TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia (2024), **12**, 95–109
doi:10.1017/trn.2023.11

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Reappraising the Narrative of Dato Mogul and Singora's Early History

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(Received 27 February 2023; revised 3 August 2023; accepted 28 September 2023)

Abstract
This article surveys and analyses the available materials on Dato Mogul, the putative first ruler of Singora (present-day Songkhla) in the early seventeenth century. It argues that the narrative in Thailand surrounding Dato Mogul and his emergence is sketchy at best. In reviewing the literature and drawing on new and extant primary sources, we argue that Dato Mogul was likely a Malay governor authorised by Ligor. This reappraisal presents a more accurate biographical narrative and provides greater insight on polity formation in Lower Siam in the period under review.

Keywords: Dato Mogul; Singora; Ayutthaya; Southeast Asian history; Southern Thailand

Introduction

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a new polity sandwiched between Nakhon Si Thammarat and Patani arose, the kingdom of Singora (present-day Songkhla). The founder of this short-lived dynasty is generally acknowledged to be a man known as Dato Mogul. In extant records, he is known as Dato Mogol, Datuk Mogul, Dato Mogul, and Datoe Mogoll, among others (Anon 1915, I: 137; Farrington and Na Pombejra 2006, 289; Lukas 2016: 139; Terpstra 1938: 78). Other lesser-known variations used include Dato Molgun and Dato Mogals (Anon 2021; Suwannachart 2009: 26). Contemporary legend states that he proclaimed himself the first ruler of Singora in the hills surrounding Songkhla port, thus establishing a new locus of authority in southern Thailand. Yet what we know about this founder is surprisingly slight and oftentimes confusing, which invites a deeper historical inquiry. This article aims to unriddle the origins of Dato Mogul and sketch out his rise to power in the context of his times. This exploration stems from a dissatisfaction with the somewhat airy writings about this individual and a shared interest in clarifying the history of an understudied region. Because of the intimate relation between person and polity, a more historically accurate portrait of Singora's founder would also shed light on the formation of polities and the fluid dynamics of power in southern Thailand in the early seventeenth century.

It must be stated at the outset that the history of Singora is only just emerging as a new field of inquiry (Bisalputra and Sng 2020; Dalrymple and Joll 2021, 2022). Earlier scholarship had previously concentrated on large strongly-centralised polities such as Ayutthaya and Sukhothai with emphasis being placed on their relations with the outer-lying parts. However, new approaches, most notably the call to reconstruct the "autonomous history" of other cities, have yielded more knowledge and have added more fruitfully to our understanding of Thailand's diverse past (Baker 2002: 167–182; Na Pombejra 2011: 142–161). It is in this vein that this research was undertaken in order to shed more light on the developments and assess the degrees of autonomy in Siamese peripheries during the seventeenth century.

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In appraising the existing Thai sources, of which the most important are official chronicles, local hagiographies, as well as semi-structured interviews conducted in Songkhla Province with key informants (conducted between 16 October 2019 and 27 January 2021), the narrative predominantly presents Dato Mogul as a Persian (or Indo-Persian) Sunni Muslim adventurer, who rode the wave of West Asian migrations into Southeast Asia, before establishing himself in Singora. However, in conducting archival research into Dutch colonial records and examining the wider scholarly writings on the person and his Persian origins, we run into conflicting accounts that seem to speak contrary to this. Moreover, during our fieldwork, local interviews reveal numerous discrepancies that are reflected in the data collected. Rather than simply dismissing them out rightly, we acknowledge that there are kernels of truth in local knowledge, which have been widely accepted as historical fact in Thailand, and that it might be beneficial to subject them to rigorous analysis. By bringing them into dialogue with the wider scholarly literature, an alternative interpretation concerning Dato Mogul becomes increasingly evident and unignorable.

This article is thus structured by its methodological approach. After first providing a brief historical background of Singora, we then look carefully at what other scholars have written about Dato Mogul and Singora, with a particular attention to his origins and descriptions of the polity. Most of the material surveyed concerns what has become standard in Thai historiography, which, although has advanced our knowledge of an understudied region, is far from criticism. In light of this re-examination, we contend that the present narrative on Dato Mogul and his emergence is sketchy at best and often punctuated by a litany of inaccuracies. Instead, based on primary and secondary textual sources, we offer a divergent perspective from popular narrative, one which aggregates what has been written into a more reflective and accurate picture. Rather than the Persian ruler of lore, we propose that Dato Mogul was likely a Malay governor authorised by Nakhon Si Thammarat. Far from the hagiographical ruler often described, the archival evidence supports the humbler origins of a man who initially governed Singora by mandate and in partnership. Finally, we offer two preliminary responses in conclusion to the question of what this revision of Singora's history means for the history and power dynamics of south Thailand.

A Short History of Singora

Singora was a historical polity which emerged at the start of the seventeenth century in the area around the Khao Daeng hills in present-day Singhanakhon district, Songkhla province in southern Thailand. The link between its settlement and the earlier Indianised states is not clear, and little is known of its history before 1600, but its location had long been a suitable intermediate trading and transshipment station for Asian and other mariners sailing from Malay Peninsula and Sumatra towards the Gulf of Siam or for East Asian merchants heading further south. The importance of the region around Singora for trade was preceded by Patani, which rose to prominence around the fifteenth century (Bougas 1990: 114), and came under the domination of Nakhon Si Thammarat, and by proxy, Ayutthaya.

As stated in the introduction, Singora was said to be established by a man named Dato Mogul, who was later succeed by his son, Sulaiman. This second ruler declared for Singora's independence in 1642 and styled himself as sultan, which invited several unsuccessful military offensives by Ayutthaya during the reign of King Prasat Thong (r. 1629–1656). Sulaiman was then succeeded by his eldest son, Mustapha (ca. 1668), but relations with Ayutthaya remained fraught, which resulted in further conflict. It is under King Narai (r. 1656–1688) that Ayutthaya laid a siege on Singora, ending with the latter's destruction in 1680, the dispersal of the ruling family, and the reintegration of the polity and the surrounding region into the Siamese fold. Even though the history of Singora during the reign of its Muslim rulers has been examined elsewhere (Dalrymple and Joll 2021, 2022), considerable mystery still surrounds the first ruler of Singora, Dato Mogul, who is often assumed to be Persian. This is the central issue that we attempt to examine in detail and problematise in the present article.

The Present Scholarship on the Persian Ruler of Singora

Several Indo-Persian personalities have appeared in Southeast Asia, moving across continents and linked to each other by shared kinship relations, commercial networks and textual practices (Figure 1). As is often candidly admitted, even though little is known about the individuals involved in these commercial

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1. Map of the Kingdom of Siam and the Gulf of Siam, with Singora (Singor) seen in clear relief just north of Patani (Patane). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Cartes et plans, CPL GE DD-2987 (7078).

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

networks, historical convergences and patterns and textual traditions serve as imperfect evidence for their movement and the presence of such itinerant missionaries, scholars, dignitaries, traders, slaves, especially from West Asia and the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia (Formichi and Feener 2015: 7). It is in this context of circulating travellers and the growing trade in the Indian Ocean that the history of Dato Mogul is often written. In almost all of the secondary materials produced on early Singora (present-day Songkhla), it is generally assumed that Dato Mogul was one of such Indo-Persian personalities who traversed eastward from Persia through South India to Southeast Asia (Perret 2011; Tschacher 2009: 49). In fact, a survey of Thai sources on Dato Mogul and Singora's early history, show that local hagiographic accounts have been used by historians, which end up being cited and re-cited in subsequent English and Thai publications. This circulation has contributed to a confused and inaccurate portrait of Dato Mogul.

It would be useful to set out for those unfamiliar what the popular local narrative is and to present a coherent story from the various publications and stories in circulation. The records that will be discussed below are: the *Phongsawadan Muang Songkhla,* Ampan Na Pattalung*'s History of the Lineage of Sultan Sulaiman,* secondary publications by Thai scholars as well as interviews conducted in Singhanakhon district. These sources are set out chronologically, based on the information provided therein. According to generally accepted accounts, the origins of Singora is linked to a trader and leader named Dato Mogul who was forced to relocate to the Songkhla region from Saleh, said to be a town or village north of present-day Yogyakarta, Java in the first decade of the seventeenth century (Ampan Na Pattalung 1988: 60). This Dato Mogul is presented by Thai scholars as a Persian or Indo-Persian Sunni Muslim merchant (Chounchaisit 2007: 158; Choungsakul 2006: 45; Chularatana 2008: 52–53; Putthongchai 2013: 98–99). Chularatana, who has written extensively about the Persian Muslim presence in Ayutthaya, proposes that Dato Mogul and his family were Persian Sunni Muslims (Chularatana 2008: 52). This assertion is cited from the work of Prayunsak Chalayondecha, which, although presenting a commendable survey of Muslim presence in Thailand, does not stand up to historical interpretation (Chalayondecha 1996: 14).[1] The author Ampan Na Pattalung, whose book *History of the Lineage of Sultan Sulaiman* is often cited by local informants, also proposes that Dato Mogul and his family were Persian Sunni Muslims (Ampan Na Pattalung 1988: 57) without in-depth discussion or corroborative evidence from other sources. Regarding the origins of Dato Mogul, Jansaeng claims that he is frequently mentioned "in the records and contemporary narratives of British and Dutch travellers" as "a Persian trader who had arrived in Songkhla from central Java" (Jansaeng 2010: 20). Yet, rather than cite from such European records, Jansaeng cites from two Thai publications instead as evidence.[2] Finally, David Wyatt merely refers to him as a Persian Gulf merchant who came to Siam (Wyatt 1979: 46).

However, it must be acknowledged that some variation exists in accounts regarding Dato Mogul's origin. Breaking from the popular narrative, Bisalputra and Sng assert that Dato Mogul was a "Shia Muslim of Persian descent" (Bisalputra and Sng 2020: 43). This hypothesis in particular was based on ethnographic interviews and material evidence collected in Bangkok. Based on Chularatana's work on ethnonyms used for Persian Muslims in Ayutthaya, Dalrymple and Joll have further suggested that the name Dato Mogul, arguably a title, could indicate that he was a Shia Muslim of Indo-Persian origin (Chularatana 2008: 44; Dalrymple and Joll 2021: 46, 48). However, since the terms were used predominantly to refer to the Shia Muslim community in Ayutthaya, coupled with a lack of evidence that the term was used in the Songkhla region before 1650, it would be difficult to regard a similarity in name or title as conclusive proof of Dato Mogul's ethnic or religious background. Significantly, the oft-quoted *Phongsawadan Muang Songkhla* (Songkhla Chronicle), which is often taken to be an authoritative record of local history, has no mention of Dato Mogul as being either Indian or Persian (Na Songkhla 1986).

Ethnicity aside, most accounts state that Dato Mogul's relocation took place in 1602 because of an invasion by Europeans (Bisalputra and Sng 2020: 43–44; Haji Umar 2003: 11; Jansaeng 2010: 20). Although it is unclear who the aggressors were and what their purpose was, the family fled northward

[1]For example, dates are inaccurate and conclusive statements are made without evidence.

[2]These sources are publications based on academic talks by the Songkhla Studies Institute at Taksin University, published in 1991 and edited by Suthiwong Pongpaiboon, which we have not been able to access.

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

because of this escalating war, departing Java with family and followers for the central peninsula region of southern Thailand. Oral accounts recount that the travelling party consisted of Indonesians from Saleh and other Persians who were part of his wider family network, including his eldest son, Sulaiman who was ten years old at the time (Ampan Na Pattalung 1988: 57–64).[3] Another testimony stated that this entourage numbered up to 300 people and were transported onboard five large ships (interview with Imam Chalee, conducted in Singhanakhon district on 29 July 2020). After several years in Singora, Dato Mogul established his kingdom (Lukas 2016: 139). Most accounts state that this occurred in 1605 by Hua Khao Daeng (Red Mountain) and that Dato Mogul managed to obtain a royal mandate to rule (Amphan Na Pattalung 1988: 72–78; Choungsakul 2006: 45). However, there are multiple competing and contradictory interpretations on the rank, status and appointment of Dato Mogul, as well as Ayutthaya's policy towards Singora. Chounchaisit (2007: 158) argues that Dato Mogul used to be the "head of pirates", an office which allowed him to "control the people" in the region. In contrast, Ampan Na Pattalung (1988: 63) proposes that Dato Mogul was a capable leader who was appointed by the local population as their leader to build a new state, because he could protect them from pirate attacks. Haji Umar (2003: 15) refers to him as a Persian dignitary (Haji Umar 2003: 15) while Chalayondecha raises his rank further to the ruler of the Javanese town of Saleh (Chalayondecha 1996: 14). After Dato Mogul arrived in Singora, Chularatana (2008:52), citing Chalayondecha (1996: 14), asserts that Dato Mogul was appointed as the first governor of Songkhla by King Songtham, while Chounchaisit (2007: 158) contends that it was King Ekathotsarot who made that appointment in 1605. Anantapak agrees with Chularatana and Chalayondecha that it was King Songtham who appointed Dato Mogul, but claims that Dato Mogul was appointed as "the ruler of Phatthalung" instead (Anantapak 2014: 73). Meanwhile Noisangiam and Hatta (2016: 175) and Suwannachart (2009: 26–27) name him as the "first king of Singora". In light of the differing interpretations of Dato Mogul's rank and status, Jansaeng adopts an uncontroversial position, concluding that Singora's political status was "rather ambiguous" since Dato Mogul submitted himself to Ayutthaya as a dependent but presented himself as the ruler or lord (Bm. *Raja*) of Singora to foreign traders (Jansaeng 2010: 20).

Furthermore, it is remembered that Dato Mogul was a strong and capable leader, experienced at sea and familiar with trade from his experiences in South and Southeast Asia (Ampan Na Pattalung 1988: 57–64). In addition to his knowledge, an oral account asserts that the population was quickly won over by Dato Mogul's evident leadership qualities and trusted that he could provide protection against attacks from pirates (interview with Ajarn Bashri, conducted in Singhanakhon district on 27 January 2021). According to an unnamed source, the name Singora was given by Arab and Persian traders because the two islands (Koh Nu and Koh Maeo, viz. Mouse Island and Cat Island) that guarded the entrance to the port resembled to them a pair of guardian lions (Kongkananda 1981: 130). This might have been the inspiration behind the naming of the town. After establishing himself as ruler, it is widely believed that Dato Mogul developed Singora by implementing tax-free trading, and he was also proactive in inviting foreign merchants to trade at Singora (Ampan Na Pattalung 1988: 72–78). This tax-free policy attracted Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese and "Muslim" traders to trade in the port-state (Bisalputra and Sng 2020: 44). In Singora, unlike Ayutthaya, official royal stamps (*tra*) were not required for trade, with "a small gift" to Dato Mogul sufficient for transactions (Anon 1915: 188; Jansaeng 2010: 33).

As a result, Singora thrived under Dato Mogul's leadership, quickly growing into a major political and economic base in southern Thailand thanks to its commercial earnings and its "strong and secure port" (Jansaeng 2010: 20–21). The movement of foreign traders and migration of local peoples added to the cosmopolitan flavour of the port-city (Chounchaisit 2007: 156). Of importance was the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, hereafter referred to by its historic initials, the VOC), which had visited and established warehouses in Ayutthaya, Nakhon Si Thammarat, and Patani. The VOC was said to have entered into discussions with Dato Mogul and eventually established a warehouse and a community in Singora as well (Jansaeng 2010: 30–32) (Figure 2). The English also followed suit not too long afterwards, establishing themselves in 1615. Dato Mogul was said to have been responsible for developing the city and building the city walls, moats and fortresses. While in Singora, Dato Mogul was said to be the father of three children, his eldest son, mentioned previously,

[3]Ampan Na Pattalung claims that Sulaiman was born on 1592 in Saleh, near Yogyakarta.

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 2. The graveyard of the Dutch community in Singora. Photo by Graham H. Dalrymple, 31 January 2023.

Sulaiman, as well as another girl and boy, Fatimah and Farisee (Pharisi). After a successful reign, setting the foundations of a profitable site, local tradition dates the death of Dato Mogul to 1620. Thereafter, his eldest son Sulaiman succeeded Dato Mogul as ruler of Singora (Amphan Na Pattalung 1988: 78–87). While reigning as ruler, he was assisted by his younger brother Farisee, while his sister, Fatimah later married into the Kedah royal family (interview with Imam Chalee, conducted in Singhanakhon district on 27 January 2021). Here then is the broad story of the founding of Singora and its Persian founder Dato Mogul.

In summarizing what has been written about Singora and Dato Mogul, it can be discerned that not only are there no original or local sources that claim an Indo-Persian origin, several assumptions have been made about the Dato Mogul's ethnic heritage and religious affiliation and his family without conclusive evidence. Indeed, upon closer re-examination, many of the writings examined here simply reproduce summaries based on existing hagiographical accounts. This pattern, which has emerged in the writing of Thai history in the region, is challenging in our quest to uncover an accurate picture of Dato Mogul and Singora's early history. In order to deal with this gap, many scholars cite unverifiable sources and rely on or repeat oral accounts knowingly or unknowingly, which conflict with information already in circulation or is plainly not based on historical facts. To add to the confusion, during the conduct of interviews in Songkhla province, we also noticed that the interviewees repeated narratives that are produced in local publications, which showed that the latter enjoyed a wide circulation and acceptance. While it might be tempting to assume a core of local storytelling and the handing down of oral memories guarded by traditional experts, this is very often not the case with the historiography of southern Thailand. Also, to the best of our knowledge, there is also no stable and traceable oral tradition concerning the origins of Dato Mogul that help clarify the authenticity of the claims by Thai scholars. To reiterate, the key points of the local hagiographical accounts have generally focused on the arrival of Dato Mogul in Southeast Asia for trade, his role in Saleh, Java, his Persian heritage and Sunni affiliation, how foreigners disrupted the region thus prompting his relocation, the arrival of Dato Mogul in southern Thailand, and finally, his rise to ruler of Singora under the sovereignty of Ayutthaya thanks to the growth in foreign trade. However, the accounts are often unclear in details, dates cited do not match historical records or events in the region and historical writing rarely provide sufficient evidence to corroborate their version of events. Thus, a portrait of Dato Mogul based on primary sources and produced through historical analysis is sorely needed.

A New Interpretation: The Malay Governor

Having critiqued what has been written about Dato Mogul in current scholarship, we now turn to show where the narrativised history as presented thus far is deficient. Several historical points can be contested. However, based on several underutilised primary and secondary sources, we can offer in return a divergent perspective, showing that he was likely a Malay governor, who first governed in partnership.

It is not difficult to challenge what has been written by other authors regarding the displacement of Dato Mogul from Java, if such was the case. As mentioned, Dato Mogul is often described as a Persian

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who relocated to Singora due to European intrusion (Haji Umar 2003: 11). To reiterate once more in greater detail, some accounts state that Dato Mogul fled oppression by the Portuguese in central Java around 1602. This place has been occasionally identified as Saleh, with other accounts elevating him to a minor ruler of the town (Chounchaisit 2007: 158). Jansaeng, drawing on Thai sources, stated that Dato Mogul and his family fled during an invasion of present-day Yogyakarta, then the political centre of the powerful Sultanate of Mataram (Jansaeng 2010: 20). Bisaputra and Sng cite the Dutch as the main antagonist in Java instead, arguing that it was their voracious appetite for spices at the expense of Muslim mercantile interest that was responsible for Dato Mogul's migration (Bisalputra and Sng 2020: 43–44).

Several points, however, cast serious doubts upon the veracity of such an interpretation. Given that this town remains to date unidentified, it can also be stated that neither Dutch nor Portuguese aggression was the cause of Dato Mogul's relocation. Beginning first with events, while there was much hostility to the Portuguese in the initial half-century following their conquest of Melaka in 1511, weakened influence and limited resources prevented them from taking advantage of internal divisions in Java by the end of the sixteenth century (Lach 1965, I: 586). While the Portuguese were able to successfully repel attacks on Melaka, notably in 1555 and 1574, these were mainly seaborne affairs; the last major Portuguese incursion into Java ended around 1527, making it far too early to make the Portuguese a credible opponent. Similarly, familiarity with Dutch inroads into Southeast Asia would immediately raise red flags with this interpretation. That the VOC was only formed in 1602 notwithstanding, the first two voyages under Cornelis Houtman (1595–97) and Van Neck respectively (1598–1600), confined themselves largely to Banten, with several smaller fleets dispatched to the Maluku islands. The Dutch were yet out of their initial phase of exploration and they were still several years from a successful insertion and displacement of Asian trade and power. Furthermore, if Dato Mogul was settled in the Sultanate of Mataram, in Central Java, where he was supposed to have been in, Dutch contacts with the Sultanate only occurred in 1613, a tentative exploration at alliance, which makes it far too early and also far too late for displacement by violence. Unless the twelve men retained by Demak in 1602 saw action in the war (Van Ittersum 2006: 8), it was unlikely that any punitive expedition by the Dutch took place around the environs of Mataram that affected Dato Mogul. Until further evidence appears, it is unlikely that a war with Europeans was to prompt Dato Mogul's voyage north, with family in train. If such a conflict had occurred, it is more likely that it was the result of unrest caused by Mataram's war with Demak, which broke out again in 1602 (Das Gupta 1997: 263; De Graaf 1958: 6–8).

However, we are on more solid ground for the first Dutch visit to Singora, for which we have ample materials to reconstruct a history. Arguably, the establishment of Singora preceded the arrival of Dato Mogul. The fourth fleet of Van Neck had set sail for Patani, when it first called at the "small city" of Singora en route on 27 October 1601. It was stated that this city belonged to the King of Mordillon (Patthalung) and that the inhabitants of Singora showed them great friendship. Patthalung, according to a *Rutter of Patani* (ca. 1584), was said to be well supplied with "fruit and foodstuff, in particular rice and meat" and said to be "stockaded and fortified" (Souza and Turley 2015: 491). And indeed, upon calling on shore, the Dutch were welcomed by the shahbandar or harbour-master, who offered them rice, various fruits, many chickens, and three large buffalos (Foreest and Booy 1980: 217). Despite the warm welcome and entreaties received to meet their king in Patthalung, the Dutch thought there was little profit to gain and moved steadily along. In considering this short visit, it is quite unlikely that the shahbandar was Dato Mogul, as he is never referred to by this title. However, more importantly, the details of this stopover, sparse they may be, patently show that some commercial structures were in place at the time for calling ships, and the accompanying presence of a shahbandar points to some sort of trade, foreign or otherwise, and its early establishment as a veritable port of call in the maritime circuits of the South China Sea well before the emergence of Dato Mogul. Indeed, based on other records at hand, there were signs that the Singora region was developing slowly but independently from about the late sixteenth century, with several small villages bordering a stream, called "Sangora" belonging likely to Patthalung and preceding Dato Mogul's supposed "founding" by several decades (Souza and Turley 2015: 491).

For more information, especially about the governorship of the region, we have to turn to the overlord of southern Thailand, Nakhon Si Thammarat, or Ligor, and the early Dutch records and activity in the region, the latter of which we have more significant yields. In David Wyatt's *Chronicle of Nakhon Si*

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Thammarat, known as *The Crystal Sands,* there is an episode regarding the establishment of Malay rulers. According to this chronicle, the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat arranged nine boats for the Malays and dispatched them to be rulers in each *mueang*. Two of these districts were towns in today's Songkhla province, Canah and Tebā. Completing the set in the immediate vicinity were the Malay rajas of Telubin, Patthalung, Kedah, Patani and Lanu. In return for governorship of these areas, the Malay rulers were required to send tribute in gold, which was collected by a supervisor (Wyatt 1975: 108–10). Even though the *Chronicle of Nakhon Si Thammarat* is imprecise with regard to dates and likely predates the establishment of Singora, it sets out the relationship Nakhon Si Thammarat and, by extension, Ayutthaya, likely had with the southern Malay provinces before 1630. The governors of these towns were largely Malays and directly appointed or ratified by Nakhon Si Thammarat, with a gift of gold, acting as a sign of fealty. This offering was later transmuted into the *bunga mas,* which were given by the rulers further south to the Ayutthaya court via Nakhon Si Thammarat. Based on this inherited pattern of relations, by about the early seventeenth century, the hierarchy of rulership had coalesced around Nakhon Si Thammarat. The status of the region, from the extant records seem to show that the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat ruled directly over Nakhon Si Thammarat, Singora, and Patthalung. The last two regions were seconded to his son, who was nominally known as the king of Patthalung. From there, each district had its own local Malay governors, likely appointed by and who sworn fealty to Nakhon Si Thammarat. This rule is vastly contrasted with Patani, which was an independent sultanate in its own right, complete with court and structure, and was reaching a brilliant apogee under a succession of female queens (Amirell 2011: 303–323).

Early Dutch presence is hushed on activity in Singora, although this silence stems both from the ad-hoc nature of company servants and the general unfamiliarity with the dynamics of the region. However, the Dutch records allow us a clearer window onto local events, albeit from an 'outsider' perspective, that go beyond what survives in local records. Naturally the reliability of these Eurocentric materials must not be left unquestioned and it is often the case that the Dutch made inaccurate comments, misrepresented information, and held hazy perceptions of the native societies they interacted. Nevertheless, in juxtaposing them against the local historiography and by relying on their more accurate dating, we are able to provide a more balanced picture to the politics around this period. It is to these Dutch records that we now turn. We know from about 1606, Victor Sprinckel was left behind as a factor in Patani alongside another Dutch shipmate from Groningen, Hendrik Janssen. From 1606 to about 1611, the Dutch conducted trade in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Singora, with several letters testifying to the traffic of goods and the occasional visitation of passing ships. No mention of Dato Mogul is made in these reports. Interest in Singora grew in tandem with the search for a permanent base in Asia and also in anticipation of profits by the expansion of the Patani-Chinese trade. Thus, it is only in 1612 that a new factory was designated to be established at Singora. The Dutch noted its strategic location, being only 14 miles from Patani, though said to be a place of little inhabitants (Terpstra 1938: 67). This is not too different from early descriptions of Singora before 1610.

After some discussion, Hendrik Janssen decided to seek permission from the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat, who exercised suzerainty over the area. A letter was sent on 13 August 1612, which was received favourably. Nakhon Si Thammarat promised to encourage foreign trade and to send, in the first instance, people for this establishment. It is in connection with this setting up of a small warehouse of stone and lime that the first mention of Dato Mogul concretely appears. In the letters exchanged, Dato Mogul was called the governor of Singora, who was dispatched in joint appointment with another prominent individual, the Orang Kaya called *Srriragoena* (Sirrigoena or Siriaragoena, likely Sri Raguna) (NA VOC 4778: 83f; Terpstra 1938: 68). Both were said to be Orang Kaya who were sent on behalf of the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat to negotiate with the Dutch and settle the area (NA VOC 4778: 83f). As an administrator, Dato Mogul was one of the signatories of the contract with Hendrik Janssen in 1612 and acted in accordance with the views of the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat, to whom he was presumably bound. The surviving copies of contracts concluded with the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat, Dato Mogul, as well as a letter written to the former to the latter leave no doubt that Dato Mogul was directly appointed by Nakhon Si Thammarat and was given authority to govern Singora from this period onwards. A surviving letter addressed to Dato Mogul by the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat is in this respect especially important, since it evidences that they corresponded in Malay, namely in written

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Jawi and that Islamic greetings were used between the two (NA VOC 4778: 77f). This letter requests Dato Mogul to allow the Dutch to settle in Singora, to let them build their house and to allow other foreigners, such as the English and the French, to settle in the place as well (See Appendix A) (Figure 3). It is clear thus from this personal letter that permission to settle in the land was given to Dato Mogul from Nakhon Si Thammarat, who was responding to a request made in Siam. In another archival document, a contract written by the Orang Kaya Sri Raguna and Dato Mogul was transcribed into Dutch. This contract with Janssen was embossed with a red seal, which had by this time formed part of a common Islamic seal-culture of the Malay world (Teh-Gallop 2016: 127). In this agreement, Dato Mogul and the Sri Raguna addressed themselves as "governors of Singora" and conveyed how pleased they were to learn that the Dutch intended to send people to trade. In return, they granted them free tolls and duties. Interestingly enough, Janssen also noted that the so-called king of Nakhon Si Thammarat, also sealed his contract with a red seal, which was "the practice of local Malays" (NA VOC 4778: 63f) and used Islamic dates. Besides hinting at a strong possibility that the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat was himself likely a Malay ruler (Mendoza 1854, II: 316), these contracts and letters reinforce the argument that Dato Mogul was part of a Malay court or faction at Nakhon Si Thammarat, perhaps a member of an inner group of courtiers that was granted favour.

By 1614, the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat delegated more power to his son, the king of Patthalung, transferring the authority and rights of Singora to him. This was confirmed by Van Nieuwenroode, who paid this king a visit. It was of vital importance that the relations with Nakhon Si Thammarat remained friendly and positive since it affected the Company's operations in Singora. When Hendrik Janssen paid a visit to the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat in 1616, he noted that the Company enjoyed good access and success in Singora because of his favour and his son's rule as sovereign lords of Singora and Patthalung

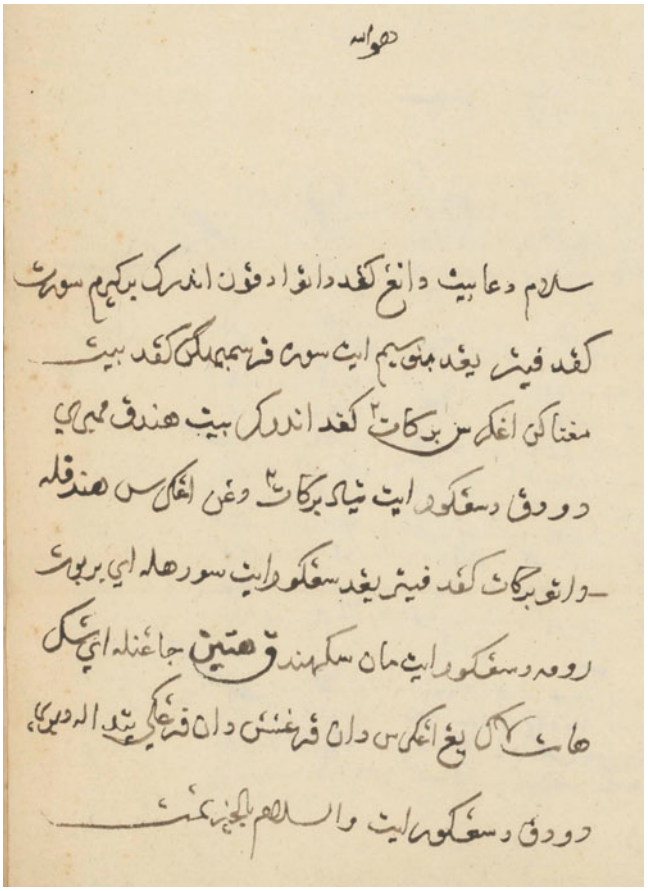

Figure 3. The letter written by the King of Nakhon Si Thammarat to Dato Mogul. NA VOC 4778: 77f. Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (See Appendix A).

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(Terpstra 1938: 85–86). The overlordship of Nakhon Si Thammarat or Patthalung over Singora would persist until 1620. This year was also a year of some significance, for the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat was old and sickly. The marriage alliance was then concluded with Patani, by which the oldest son and successor (viz. the king of Patthalung and Singora) was to marry a royal of Patani, solidifying relations between the two polities. This was ostensibly to unite the two kingdoms into a closer coalition against Aceh and its enemies and seemed to preclude the possibility of any major changes in kingship (NA VOC 1072: 266). According to *the Hikayat Patani*, the two figures in question are likely the Okphaya Deca of Patthalung and Raja Kuning of Patani (Teeuw and Wyatt, 1970: 15–16). Yet by about 1622, an English report of ports around the region noted that Singora was firmly under "the Government of Datoe Mogol…", where no customs are paid and by which a small gift to Datoe Mogol can effect all there" (Anon 1915: 188). We can thus speculate that by about 1622, Sri Raguna was no longer present and whether by causes scheming or natural, Dato Mogul had emerged as the sole governor and the most prominent person in the region.

On the basis of the available materials retrieved from the Dutch archives, a careful reading of them, adding to contemporary observations, and what can be gleaned from published sources, several new and key aspects of Dato Mogul can be made, which are contrary to what has been propagated in most writings.

First, the silence on his faith and ethnicity makes it highly suspicious that he was a Persian. It can even be argued that his Indo-Persian heritage was a later invention. As seen above, it is possible that the Persian heritage of Dato Mogul stems from a backdated interpretation of his title Mogul, a term which only gained currency to refer to Persianate Muslims after the 1660s or that it was conflated due to the intermarriage of Dato Mogul's family with the family of Sheikh Ahmad after the 1680s, especially after their imprisonment and relocation to Chaiya (in modern-day Surat Thani) and Ayutthaya (Chularatana 2008: 52; Dalrymple and Joll 2022: 54, 65). Certainly, his Persianness was never picked up upon by any contemporary foreign observers, which is strange considering usual perceptions on matters of this sort in travel writing. At least, when one remembers that even during the travels of Ibn Battuta in the fourteenth century that Persians were already becoming somewhat of a noteworthy anomaly, an itinerant Persian trader who become ruler should have been of some considerable wonder to merit some attention especially in the early seventeenth century. This is supported by the observation of Guillot (2020: 429–30) who remarked that by the end of the sixteenth century, though independent Persian merchants were still present, "their number and their role seem to decrease gradually over the years". On the contrary, what is perhaps the strongest evidence of Dato Mogul's heritage is the Malay identity of his son, Sulaiman, who took over as governor of Singora in the 1630s. The *Phongsawadan Muang Songkhla* (Songkhla Chronicle) states that Sulaiman was a "Malay Muslim", based at Hua Khao Daeng (Jansaeng 2010: 21; Na Songkhla 1986). Other references from French ambassadorial delegates in the 1680s commented that the ruler of 1640s was a Malay Muslim, who persisted in rebellion against Ayutthaya (Cho 1999: 59). This titbit of information can be traced to the priest Desouci, who was a member of Louis XIV's embassy to Ayutthaya. It was Dato Mogul's son who promoted himself as king, calling himself "Phra Chao Mueang Songkhla" (Ishii 1998: 144; Jansaeng 2010: 23) and who sought dependence from Ayutthaya, and not Dato Mogul. In particular, a brass cannon, captured from the city and later whisked away to London, is marked with inscriptions in Malay and Arabic, clearly testify to the Malay identity of the ruler and the city (Blagden 1941: 123; Dalrymple and Joll 2021; Scrivener 1981: 170). There is no Persian inscribed on this cannon. Dhiravat na Pombejra has not commented on the Persianness of Dato Mogul but suggested in his thesis on Siam under the Prasat Thong dynasty that a possible reason why Singora rebelled later was to assert its "Malay/Muslim identity" against the "Siamese-Buddhist world" (Na Pombejra 1984: 228). Finally, the contracts with the VOC from 1611 and 1612 show that not only did he correspond with the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat in Malay, he likely did too with the Dutch and used Malay seals. In light of the new evidence, a more persuasive interpretation, to combine with existing oral and hagiographical accounts, would be to state that Dato Mogul retained some measure of his early Persianate roots dating to a much earlier period of migration, which is passed down in memory and oral tradition. Stating this however, buries unsatisfactorily his genealogy into the unknowable past.

Second, while his migration from Java might be doubtful, it is not implausible and should not be dismissed out of hand. We know for example, that there were many Javanese slaves in Patani and that many

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of them had migrated to other settlements and operated on the seas in the region since the early sixteenth century. Dato Mogul might have been descended from one of them, but no precise information is available. What we can tell from the strength of local tradition is that Dato Mogul was a stranger and a foreigner to these parts, perhaps a recent one. But considering how important foreign trade, with the English and Dutch in particular, was to the success of Singora, it is arguable that the uncertain foundations of his flight from Saleh could have been perpetuated based on broad interpretations of history. In other words, it is unlikely that his move was prompted by a conflict with Europeans. This deeply ahistorical origin also seems to have been created and circulated with the intention of providing a more exalted lineage (in connection with the Persianate links) to mask what was perhaps a conventional or contestable rise to power and add further legitimacy to an uncertain reign. Based on the unstable nature of kingship, the prominence of the stranger as a potential ruler, as well as other similar "inventions" in the region, this would not be far from the ordinary (Sahlins 2008: 189–90). On the other hand, the records say nothing thus far about his presence in Singora before his appointment in 1612, which gives us a far wider range of dates than hitherto thought possible. Even if we take 1602 as the date of his relocation, it is highly unlikely that Dato Mogul was able to transform his fortunes in the space of ten years in the poor and unremarkable settlement that was Singora by force and personality alone without building on existing relationships and patronage. Instead of Siam, it was far more plausible that he came to a certain prominence at the court of Nakhon Si Thammarat, working his way up to become an Orang Kaya, to at least be considered a possible candidate for governorship and rule.

Third, far from being the founder of the city, who found vassalage profitable to an indifferent Siam, Dato Mogul was instead one of two local administrators, alongside Sri Raguna, who governed the area on behalf of the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat, and later his son, the king of Patthalung. Not only was he not the founder of the city, since Singora was a city testified to before 1602, the extant contracts offer irrefutable proof to his joint appointment as governor of Singora in 1612 and his own subservience to Nakhon Si Thammarat. If the records are to be believed, Dato Mogul remained a governor all his life. His elevation to the first ruler of Singora seems to have been posthumously ascribed during the reign of his son, Sultan Sulaiman.

Conclusion

In bringing together these findings and interpretations, we present a revised and new narrative of the early history of Dato Mogul and Singora, in which the origins of Singora are independent of Dato Mogul. The broad narrative that seems to emerge is as follows.

By the late sixteenth century, there were several villages in existence in the location where Singora once stood and had continued to grow into the early seventeenth century. The Singora region, including the hills around Hua Khao Daeng, was indirectly governed by Nakhon Si Thammarat. The king of Nakhon Si Thammarat around that time delegated Singora and Patthalung to his son. When Dutch ships visited in 1601, it had developed into a small "city" that had already some commercial structures in place, including a port for ships to call at, and more noticeably a shahbandar who organised trade in the settlement. It is likely that this was a small village settlement or town rather than an important trading metropolis. As the Dutch established themselves in Patani, located southward of Singora, they began to increase in their commercial ventures in Siam. This brought them into contact with the king of Nakhon Si Thammarat. In 1612, they obtained permission to set up a small warehouse at Singora from Nakhon Si Thammarat because of their expanding trade in Patani. The king of Nakhon Si Thammarat then dispatched two Orang Kaya of his, Dato Mogul and Sri Raguna, to the region to take charge and settle the area. It is possible that they brought their people or they might have been swelled by arrivals from nearby Patani. This Dato Mogul could still have had Indo-Persian origins, perhaps from an earlier period, and was likely a foreigner in these parts although this was never remarked upon in dealings with the Dutch. Dato Mogul might have relocated to southern Thailand in 1602 but this was not remarked upon until much later, when he had already established himself not as a dependent of Ayutthaya but as an Orang Kaya of Nakhon Si Thammarat. From the letters and contracts, Dato Mogul was conversant in Malay and used Malay seals. Furthermore, based on the later writings of Dato Mogul's son and other material finds, notably a bronze cannon, we can assert that Dato Mogul's family was probably Malay,

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or identified as Malay at this point in time. Dato Mogul and Sri Raguna welcomed the arrival of the Dutch to trade in the region by promising to grant them free tolls and duties. The English followed suit not too long after, in 1615. With this agreement in place, Dato Mogul established himself in the hills of Hua Khao Daeng and benefited from the foreign trade arriving on its strategically located shores. It had a good port for trade, hills to provide security from pirates, and fertile lands for pepper crop production (Baker *et al.* 2005: 152; Lukas 2016: 131; Ruangsilp 2007: 131). It exported tin and lead, but also large quantities of pepper and its port was impressive as it could cope with high volumes of maritime trade (Jansaeng 2010: 32). As a result, Singora thrived under Dato Mogul's leadership, slowly growing into a viable political and economic base in southern Thailand thanks to its commercial earnings and its "strong and secure port" (Jansaeng 2010: 20). The movement of foreign traders and migration of local peoples added to the cosmopolitan flavour of the port-city (Chounchaisit 2007: 156; King 2006: 46). Meanwhile, while political changes were taking place in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Dato Mogul emerged as the sole governor of Singora, to whom all traders seem to pay tribute. Dato Mogul was not responsible for developing the city and building the city walls, moats and fortresses (Figure 4). That was the task of his son, Sulaiman, who witnessed the destruction of Singora by Siamese troops in the 1633–34 and was later appointed Okphra Songkhla directly by Ayutthaya and awarded a golden betel box for its reconstruction (Na Pombejra 1984: 226). Nevertheless, Dato Mogul helped develop Singora on the maritime routes and as a calling station for foreign ships. While in Singora, Dato Mogul was said to be the father of three children, his eldest son, the previously mentioned Sulaiman, as well as another girl and boy, Fatimah and Farisee (Pharisi). Although these names, and even grandchildren (Hasan and Hussein) hint at their Persianate origins, these details still insufficient as argument or evidence, and await further research (Dalrymple and Joll 2022: 79). After a moderately successful reign, setting the foundations of a profitable site, local tradition dates the death of Dato Mogul to 1620. English records state in 1622 that he was still governor although this might have been an outdated observation. Thereafter, his eldest son, Sulaiman, succeeded Dato Mogul as governor of Singora. This is thus the revised story of the founding of Singora and its "founder" Dato Mogul.

Several questions might be posed as a conclusion: What then does this revised narrative mean for the history of Singora? And what new insights can this analysis hold for the reconstruction of power dynamics in southern Thailand in the early seventeenth century? Two preliminary takeaways might be offered here in this context. First, Singora's early history and founding have much more to do with Nakhon Si Thammarat than previously assumed, and that more research could shed light on the complicated power struggles that eventually shaped the history of southern Thailand. While it is well established that Nakhon Si Thammarat is a city of considerable antiquity and importance, and helped enforce loyalty to the Ayutthayan kings of southern rulers during the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, its role has

Figure 4. A contemporary sketch of Singora during the seventeenth century (Thongmit 2018: 3)

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often been understated, confined to episodic revolt and its tin trade with the Dutch. More research awaits too the other individual, Sri Raguna who disappears from the region very soon thereafter and might have played an important role in Singora's early development. Nevertheless, it is through this clarification of archival records regarding the history of Dato Mogul, who developed Singora on borrowed power, that we begin to scratch at the networks of dependencies, regional feuding and alliances forged in the south, providing a richer and more complex texture of its fathomable past.

Second, it confirms and adds to the pattern of what we know of the founding of new polities in Southeast Asia in the period under review. Both in the local chronicles and corroborated through the European records left to us, we can observe an explicit connection between court policy/factionalism, local autonomy, merchant knowledge, a mutually beneficial arrangement of trade, Chinese labour and market, European insertion into Asian networks, as well as the union of the foreign with the indigenous that contributed meaningfully to the foundation of a viable polity between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In particular, political power depended on the wealth of trade which was an important aspect "for the formation of coastal, harbour-centred systems" (Manguin 1991: 53). The establishment of Singora by an enterprising individual appears to confirm what Victor Lieberman has described as a "stable maritime consolidation" during a period of prosperity, where economic stimuli by European intervention and indigenous reorganisation du ring a period of "multistate parity" allowed for the emergence of stranger kings and new polities (Lieberman 2003: 214; 2009: 820–21; Sahlins 2008: 192–3). Through careful management, Dato Mogul and Sri Raguna were able to take advantage of their strategic location for maritime trade, which was responsible for the successful growth and increase in autonomy of Singora. This was not only the key factor of its rise, but would also attract the attention of the Siamese kings later in the century, leading to its eventual demise.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to acknowledge Dr Chris Baker for proof reading the manuscript and providing recommended edits.

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Appendix A: Transcription and Translation of the Letter[4]

Hu Allah

Salam doa beta datang kepada dato ada pun Andrek berkirim surat kepada feitor yang di Betawi Siam itu surat persembahkan kepada beta mengatakan Inggeris berkata-2 kepada Andrek beta hendak memberi duduk di Singkor itu tiada berkata2 dengan Inggeris hendaklah – dato berkata kepada Peter yang di Singkor di itu suruhlah ia berbuat rumah di Singkor itu mana sekehendak hatinya Janganlah ia syak hati lagi yang Inggeris dan Perancis dan Feringgi tiadalah diberi duduk di Singkor itu

Wassalam bilkhair

Allah himself

My greetings to you. I [the king] received from Dato also that Hendrik [Janssen] sent a letter to the factor in Batavia. The Siamese presented me with a letter saying that the English said to Hendrik that I want to let him settle in Singora. He should not speak with the English. Let Dato say to Pieter who is in Singora, tell him to build a house in Singora as he pleases. Do not let him doubt that the English, French and other foreigners [or Portuguese] are not allowed to settle in Singora.

Peace to you and be well.

[4]NA VOC 4778: 77f. The authors thank Saharah Abubakar for helping to transcribe and translate this letter from Jawi.

Cite this article: Khoo BJQ, Dalrymple GH (2024). Reappraising the Narrative of Dato Mogul and Singora's Early History. *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* **12**, 95–109. https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2023.11