

A SIAMESE LETTER DATED 7 DECEMBER 1776

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In the Danish National Archives a considerable number of documents are preserved from the files of the (Danish) Asiatic Company and from the Government of Tranquebar. The Asiatic Co. file no. 2188b has the title: *Documents with reference to Pegu, Siam, Kedah, Johore, Cambodia, and Manila, 1682-1776*. Only one letter in this package is written in Siamese. It is dated 7 December 1776, and is accompanied by a Portuguese translation -- or perhaps, more precisely, a Portuguese version of the letter -- under the same seal as the original, that of the Siamese King's 'Primeiro Ministro' (/phrá? khlaŋ/ in Siamese). The recipient is the Danish governor of Tranquebar, (David) Brown. On an accompanying sheet is added information that the letters have been extracted from a bamboo tube.

The letter was registered by Henning Engelhart in 1780 together with other documents concerning Tranquebar and the following résumé of its contents was given (here translated from Danish): 'A letter in the Siamese language, from the King of Siam or his Prime Minister, to Governor Brown, containing requisitions of ammunition, inviting to trade with Siam, and promising assistance.'

In 1973 the National Archives asked Pensak Chagsuchinda, Lecturer in Thai in the University of Copenhagen, and me for a comment on the accuracy of the above résumé, and we supplied the Archives with a somewhat more detailed translation. Recently I had occasion to look at the letters again and decided to translate the original Siamese as well as the Portuguese versions and to supply some notes on both.¹

Transcription of the Siamese text

- 1.1. năŋsŷy năwāabthāncāwphájaaphrá?khlaŋphūujājná?kruŋthēebphrá? -
māhāanākhoon miimáthúra?
2. cīdsānīdsānēehāa maathēəŋjooŋbroonsēenaacāwdiinmāg-
phūupencāwmyantraŋkaabāad dūa,j
3. phrá?bāadsōmdēdphrá?māhāakrāsādtraathīrāadcāwthīisūŋjā,j
miiphrá?rāadchá?ooŋkaanmaan

- 7.4. phráʔbanthuunsùrásĩṇhànâaddamrâdn̄yáklâwn̄yákrâmòmsàṇwâa
náʔmòorásũm
5. piwṑogʔâdthàsògkâpitanlègʔṑogmaacâdsýpyynnáʔmyañtraṇ-
kaabâadphanbṑogkhâwpajthuum
6. klâwthuunkrâmòmtḥâwâaj tṑṇphráʔrâadchâprâsṑṇpyynkhâab-
silaaʔĩgm̄yynbṑog cyṇ
7. tēṇhâjkâpitanlègʔṑogmaacâdsýynáʔmyañtraṇkaabâad
khṑohâjcâwmyañtraṇkaa
8. bâadhēnkēēthaṇphráʔrâadchâmajtrii lēmajtriichûaj-
thamnúʔbamruṇcâdcēēṇhâjkâpitan
9. lēgdâjpyynm̄yynbṑogkâwmaaconṣâdùag thâacâwmyañtraṇ-
kaabâadcâʔtṑṇkaandiibùg
10. kṑʔhâjtēṇkampānkhâwmaarábʔawdiibùgkēēkâpitanlègnáʔ-
myañthâlâāṇhògbṑogtṑo
11. phaaraa thâacâʔtṑṇkaañṇaachâāṇṇyámájsĩnkhâasĩṇdajnáʔ-
kruṇthēebphráʔmáhāanákhoonkâpĩ
12. tanlègrúuraakhaajùulēēw hâjtēṇkampānbanthúgpyynkhâw-
maasṑṇḍâjthēēṇkruṇthēebphráʔ
13. máhāanákhooncâʔkhĩdraakhaahâjkhroḃtaamcamnuankhâapyyn-
mĩʔhâjkhâāṇkēonkhâdsōṇjùudâj prâ
14. kaann̄ṇṇthâacâwmyañtraṇkaabâadcâʔtēṇkampānbanthúgphan-
phâaphrēēphansĩnkhâakhâw
15. pajkhâakhâajnáʔkruṇthēebphráʔmáhāanákhoon lēraakhaa-
phanphâaraakhaaṇaachâāṇṇyámájsĩn
16. náʔkruṇthēebphráʔmáhāanákhoonnán kâpitanlègrúulēēw-
hâjtēṇkampānbanthúgkhâw
17. pajthēēdrawcâʔchûajthamnúʔbamruṇmĩʔhâjphanphâasĩnkhâa-
khṑoṇcâwmyañtraṇkaabâadkhâadkhâāṇjùudâjpenʔankhâad
18. thiidiawn̄ṇṣýymaanâʔwanʔaṇkhaandyanʔâajrēēmsĩb-
khâmcunlâsâgkârâadphanrṑojsâamsĩbpēēdpīwṑogʔâdthàsòg

Notes to the text

7.1 /n̄ṇṣýy/ 'letter'. The /a/ is written by means of the diacritical sign which is now reserved for the tonal marker /m̄ájthoo/. In this letter no distinction is made between /m̄ájhān ʔaakâad/ and /m̄ájthoo/. This will not be pointed out

• หนังสือ ขนทาบขนตาพญพาลลงสู่หูลูกนกทั้งเทพพระมหากษัตริย์ มีพระ
จิตตวิมลเนหา มาถึงของบรรดาเสนาเจ้าผู้มิตต์เป็นเจ้าเมืองตวันกษัตริย์
พระบาทสมเด็จพระมหาจักรพรรดิราชเจ้าผู้ยิ่งใหญ่ มีพระราชโอรสทรงนาม
พระบันฑิตสุวรรณสิงห์ทรงแก้วแก้วหนึ่ง กล้าเหนือกระหม่อมสงคราญเมืองสุโขทัย
บิณฑกอุคคกบัตินเหล็กออกมาจตุรชัยขึ้นเมืองตวันกษัตริย์แห่งเมืองสุโขทัย
กล้าทูลกระหม่อมถวาย ของพระราชาประสูติขึ้นคาบศิลาอันใหญ่โต
แจ้งให้กบัตินเหล็กออกมาจตุรชัยเมืองตวันกษัตริย์ ชื่อนี้เจ้าเมืองตวันก
ษัตริย์เห็นแก่ทางพระราชไมตรี เสด็จไมตรีช่วยทำนุบำรุงจัดแจงให้กบัติน
เหล็กไต่ขึ้นห่มเป็นปกเทมทั้งสกลกษัตริย์เจ้าเมืองตวันกษัตริย์ของราชเจ้า
กให้แจ้งกับกบัตินเหล็กมาเสวยตักแกกบัตินเหล็กจนเมืองตวันกษัตริย์
สกลกษัตริย์เจ้าเมืองตวันกษัตริย์ไม่สิ้นกำลังโดยนักทั้งเทพพระมหากษัตริย์
จันเหล็กก็ยกอยู่ เสด็จให้แจ้งกับกบัตินเหล็กขึ้นเทมสิ่งใดสิ่งหนึ่งเทพ
พระมหากษัตริย์ก็ยกให้ครบตามจำนวนตวันกษัตริย์มีให้ทางเสนาบดีสนอญได้
ทรงบิณฑกเจ้าเมืองตวันกษัตริย์แจ้งกับกบัตินเหล็กพลกษัตริย์เสนาบดี
บิณฑกขอยกทั้งเทพพระมหากษัตริย์ เสด็จมาพบเสนาบดีทั้งเสนาบดี
นกลึงเทพพระมหากษัตริย์นั้น กบัตินเหล็กก็อยู่ เสด็จให้แจ้งกับ
เสนาบดีสนอญขอยกทั้งเทพพระมหากษัตริย์เสนาบดีเจ้าเมืองตวันกษัตริย์
ให้เสนาบดีสนอญขอยกทั้งเสนาบดีสนอญขอยกทั้งเสนาบดีสนอญขอยก

in every single case in the following notes.

/náwàab/ 'Nabob'. The first syllable is spelt with the letter /nɔɔ neen/ as if it meant 'at, in'. The scribe may well have misunderstood the expression, thinking that /wàab/ was a noun designating something like 'residence, domicile'. But cf. /nákhɔɔn/ below.

/thân/ 'title'. This title is spelt with a long /aa/ as in the modern orthography, but without the tonal marker /májʔèeg/.

/câw/ 'lord'. In this word the /májthoo/ has its usual force. All examples of this will not be pointed out below.

/phájaa/ 'title' is written with a conventional ligature.

/phráʔ/ 'honorific prefix' is written with a ligature in which the /r/ does not take on its usual shape.

/jàj/ 'big' is spelt with /májmálaaj/ rather than /májmúan/, and with /májthoo/ instead of /májʔèeg/.

/kruŋ/ 'capital city' is in this letter consistently equipped with a /jàadnámkháaŋ/.

/nákhɔɔn/ 'city'. The first syllable is spelt with /nɔɔ neen/ rather than with /nɔɔ núu/, and the second has the vowel /ɔɔ/ written out instead of the /r/ serving for vowel plus final consonant.

/mii/ 'have' is spelt with a vowel symbol consisting of modern /sàràʔ ʔỳʔ/ plus modern /májʔèeg/ (a combination of /sàràʔ ʔìʔ/ with both /jàadnámkháaŋ/ and /fǒnthɔɔŋ/). This symbol is used in this style for any of the vowels /i/, /ii/ or /yy/. We shall call it the 'general i/y vowel'.

/máthúraʔ/ 'sweet'. Both of the short /a/ vowels are indicated with the /wísānchānii/. There is not much consistency in the use or non-use of this symbol in this style.

2.2 /cid/ is spelt /cìdtrà/ even though the meaning is probably 'mind, heart' rather than 'variegated, wonderful'. The two are not consistently kept apart in modern usage either. The word is spelt with the general i/y vowel.

/sànið/ 'amiable' is spelt with final /cɔɔ caan/ instead of /thɔɔ tháhāa/ or /thɔɔ thoŋ/, the vowel is written with the general i/y.

/sànèehāa/ 'friendship' has the vowel /ee/ placed between /s/ and /n/ and is written without a tonal marker.

/thǽŋ/ 'reach' is spelt with a combination of preposed /sàrà? ʔee/ plus the general i/y. This combination could not indicate any other vowel than /əə/.

/broon/ can also be read /bruan/. /sàrà? ʔoo/ and /woo wēen/ are not clearly distinguished in this style.

/diinmág/ 'Denmark' reflects Portuguese Dinamarca. The /n/ is spelt with /roo rya/ (see also the discussion of the Pidgin Portuguese forms for 'Denmark' in Egerod 1958:111-14). The vowel is spelt with the specific symbol for long /ii/.

/pen/ 'to be'. The vowel shortener /májtàjkhúu/ does not appear in this text.

/myaŋ/ 'city' is spelt with the usual elements, except that the superscript symbol is the general i/y vowel (perhaps with an added unexplained /fonthooŋ/, cf. 1.5 below).

/traŋkaabàad/. The final consonant /d/ is spelt with /thoo tháhaan/, reflecting an original supradental -ḍ, which comes out as -r in Portuguese, Danish, etc. The initial /b/ in /bàad/ is joined with the vowel /aa/ in a ligature involving the /khoom/ script form of the letter /b/.

1.3 /sǒmdèd/ 'royal prefix'. The /om/ is spelt with both the superposed /jàadnámkháaŋ/ and the /m/, thus presenting a mixture of Siamese (/m/ only) and Cambodian (/jàadnámkháaŋ/ only) conventions.

/kràsàd/ 'king' has an unetymological /-r-/ (Skt. ksatriya) /sǒo sýa/ rather than /sǒo rrysíi/. The /i/ of /-athíráad/ is the general i/y.

/thíi/ is spelt in exactly the same way as /thyy/ would now be spelt.

/maan/ is spelt as if it were Skt. māraṇa 'killing'. The word is, however, of Cambodian origin and is the equivalent of Siamese /mii/ 'to have'. The example used in the *Thai Royal Academy dictionary* (*Photchanānukrom* 1950:695b) we find here /maan phrá?banthuun/ which is parallel to the preceding phrase /mii phrá?ráadchá?ooŋkaan/.

1.4 /banthuun/ 'command' is spelt with /noo núu/ in the first syllable and /loo liŋ/ in the second, where the present official orthography has /noo neen/ and /roo rya/. Pallegoix (1854:47) has /loo liŋ/ finally as in Cambodian.

/sùrá/ is spelt with a long /uu/ by confusion of /sùrá?/ 'godly' with /suurá?/ 'hero'. The /r/ is doubled for no obvious reason.

/sĩŋ/ in /sĩŋhânâad/ 'lion's roar' is spelt with /ii/; /nâad/ with /dɔɔ chádaa/ through confusion of 'roar' /-thɔɔ tháhãan/ with 'dancing' (though this is normally spelt with 'long t' rather than 'long d').

/damràd/ 'royal speech' has final /dɔɔ dèg/ instead of /sɔɔ sýa/.

/nỹa/ 'above' has superscript /ii/ rather than /yy/ the first time, the general i/y the second time.

/mɔ̃m/ in /kramɔ̃m/ 'top of head', no tonal marker.

/sàn/ 'command', no tonal marker.

/mɔɔrásum/ 'monsoon'. The /ɔɔ/ is spelt out. /rá/ is spelt with the rare letter /ryy/, perhaps by false association with words beginning with /mɔɔry-/, designating 'death', and also perhaps with /rýduu/ 'season'.

7.5. /pii/ 'year' is written with a special ligature combining features of the superscript part of /pɔɔ plaa/ and the superscript vowel which serves the same purposes as the general i/y symbol.

/ʔădthâ/ '8'. The /thɔɔ thãan/ is replaced by the simpler /dɔɔ chádaa/.

/sɔ̃g/ 'year' is written with the /fannũu/ or 'rat's teeth' (also so named in Cambodian) to indicate the short, otherwise 'inherent' /o/. The two consonants are joined in a special ligature with a lower than normal position of the upstroke of the /sɔ̃ɔ sãalaa/.

/kâpitan/ 'Captain'. The first syllable is spelt with /fõnthɔɔŋ/ (identical with modern /májʔèeg/). The second syllable is spelt exactly like the word /pii/ 'year' above.

/lèg/ 'Personal Name'. Since no vowel shortener is used in this style, we do not know whether /lèg/ or /lèeg/ is intended. Whichever it is, it is likely to be wrong (see below: Notes to the translation).

/sýy/ 'buy', no tonal marker.

/pyyn/ 'gun' contains the same ligature as is used for /pii/ and /pĩ/ above.

/myaŋ/. The vowel is /sàràʔ ʔĩʔ/ plus /fõnthɔɔŋ/; the element /jãadnãmkhãaŋ/, used in 7.2 above, is missing.

/khâw/ 'enter' is written with a ligature which blends /khɔɔ khâj/ and /sârâʔ ʔaa/ into one symbol.

1.6. /thâwâaj/ 'give' has a superfluous /májhǎnʔaakâad/ = /májthoo/ to indicate the short /a/.

/tɔŋ/ 'must', no tonal marker.

/pràsɔŋ/ 'desire'. The 'inherent' /o/ is indicated with /fǒnthɔɔŋ/, and not the /fannuu/ as in /sòg/, 1.5 above. There is no silent /khɔɔ khwâaj/ finally.

/sìlaa/ 'flintlock' is nonsensically spelt with initial /sǐi/ 'prefix of splendour' -- the guns could not have been that exceptional!

/mǎyn/ '10,000', no tonal marker.

/cyŋ/ 'then', with general i/y.

1.7. /tèŋ/ 'arrange' has /májthoo/ instead of májʔèeg/.

/khɔɔ/ 'ask' is spelled with /khɔɔ khùad/, which would be etymologically correct for the homophonous word meaning 'hook'. There is a /fannuu/ over the consonant.

1.8. /kèɛ/ 'to', no tonal marker.

/majtrii/ 'friendship' is twice spelt with /sârâʔ ʔyʔ/.

/chûaj/ 'help', no tonal marker.

/thammuʔ/ 'tend', spelt with /nɔɔ neen/.

/cɛɛŋ/ 'prepare' is spelt with /májthoo/ for no obvious reason.

1.9. /pyyn/ has been equipped with an extra /májʔèeg/. cf. 1.5 and 6 above.

/coŋ/ 'make to be'. The 'inherent' /o/ is indicated by means of /fǒnthɔɔŋ/ as in /pràsɔŋ/, 1.6 above.

/câʔ/ 'verbal auxiliary'. In this word the /fǒnthɔɔŋ/ is used for the short vowel /a/ instead of the /wísanchánii/.

1.10. /kɔʔ/ 'then' is spelt with /kɔɔ kâj/ and no markers.

/kampàn/ 'ship', no tonal marker.

/thālāaŋ/ 'Place Name'. The short /a/ is spelt with /fōnthoŋ/; cf. /kāpitan/, 1.5 above.

/hōg/ 'six' has /jāadnāmkhāaŋ/ to indicate the short /o/; cf. /sōmdèd/ 1.3 above.

/tōo/ 'per' has the vowel written out plus a /fannūu/ above the /t/; cf. /khōo/ in 1.7 above.

1.11. /chāaŋ/ is written with a ligature that joins some features of /choo chāaŋ/ with the /aa/.

/nyā/ 'meat' is spelt with /sārā? ʔʔ/ instead of /ʔy/ and has no tonal marker.

/māj/ 'wood' has /mājmúan/ instead of /mājmālaaj/, and no tonal marker.

/sīn/ 'goods' is spelled with the general i/y symbol, as is also /sīŋ/ 'thing' (no tonal marker).

/daj/ 'any' has /mājmālaaj/ instead of /mājmúan/ and is equipped with a meaningless final /joo jāg/.

1.12. /jūu/ 'be at', no tonal marker.

/banthūg/ 'load'. The official orthography writes double /roo rya/ to indicate /an/, a convention not followed here.

/sōŋ/ 'send'. The 'inherent' /o/ is indicated with /jāadnāmkhāaŋ/ (cf. 11. 3,10) above); there is no tonal marker.

/dāj/ 'can' is spelt with /mājmúan/ rather than with /mājmālaaj/.

1.13. /khfd/ 'calculate' is spelt with /sārā? ʔii/ (or sārā? ʔiʔ/ with superposed /fōnthoŋ/).

/raakhaa/ 'price' is equipped with a /mājthoo/ on the second syllable -- not used in the line above -- through confusion with /khāa/ 'price', spelt the same way later in this line, with /mājthoo/ instead of /mājʔèeg/.

/khrób/ 'complete' has /jāadnāmkhāaŋ/ for /o/ as in several other words above.

/camnuan/ 'amount'. The final /-n/ is written /roo rya/.

/míʔ/ 'not' has the same elements as /mii/ in 1.1, but with the /fōnthoŋ/ closer to the /jāadnāmkhāaŋ/, which is, however, not the case in 1.17 below.

/khǎaŋ/ 'unfinished'; no tonal marker.

/kǎən/ 'exceed'. The superscript is /sǎràʔ ʔyy/ and not /sǎràʔ ʔiʔ/.

/sǒn/ in/khǎdsǒn/ 'needy' has /jǎadnámkhǎaŋ/ for /o/ as in /khrǒb/, etc., above.

2.14. /nǎŋ/ 'one' is spelt /nyŋ/. This is often the actual pronunciation in modern Thai; the word has a complicated history with dialect variants contradicting each other as to tone and initial consonant category.

/phan/ 'kind, sort' is lacking the final /nǒo neen/ in the first, but not in the second instance, whereas a /mǎjhanʔaakǎad/ is used in the first, but not in the second instance.

/phǎa/ 'cloth', no tonal marker.

/phrɛɛ/ 'silk' has double /rǒo rya/ for no obvious reason, surrounded by two occurrences of /phan/, correctly spelled with double /r/.

2.15. /khǎaj/ 'sell'. The initial plus the vowel are written by means of a ligature combining /khǒo khǎad/, not etymologically correct, and /aa/.

/náʔ/ 'at, in' seems equipped with a /fǒnthǒoŋ/, differently from 2.1 and 2.6.

/raakhaa/ is spelt as in 2.13; /phan/ as in the first instance in 2.14.

/nǎa/ is written with the general i/y vowel, differently from 2.11.

2.16. /nǎn/ 'that' is equipped with two superimposed markers identical with modern /mǎjthoo/, the lower one indicating the vowel, the upper one the tone.

/kǎpitan/ has no marker on the first syllable.

2.17. /thǎəd/ 'final particle' is spelt with /thǒo thǎhǎan/ rather than /thǒo thǎŋ/ and with superscript /sǎràʔ ʔyy/ rather than /sǎràʔ ʔiʔ/.

/chǎaj/, no tonal marker.

/míʔ/ seems equipped, on top of the general i/y vowel, with a meaningless /mǎjthoo/.

/phanphâa/ is spelt as in 1.14.

/kh[̣]ɔŋ/ 'of' is spelt with /kh[̣]ɔ kh[̣]uad/, which happens to be etymologically correct.

/traŋkaabâad/ 'Place Name'. The last syllable has a meaningless /májthoo/.

/khâad/ 'lack' begins with the same ligature as /kh[̣]aa/ in 1.15, again not etymologically correct. The last syllable of /ʔankhâad/ 'absolutely' seems to be spelt the same way. The words in between /khâad/ and /ʔankhâad/ are hard to make out, because of the seal which is superimposed upon them.

1.18. /thii/ 'instance' is spelt like the modern /thyy/.
/ʔaŋkhaan/ 'Mars, Tuesday' is spelt with a long vowel /aa/ found in the first syllable as well.

/dyan/ 'month' has superscript /sârâʔ ʔii/ instead of /saraʔ ʔyy/.

/ʔâa/ 'first', no tonal marker.

/sib/ '10' has /saraʔ ʔii/ instead of /sârâʔ ʔiʔ/.

/phan/ '1000' is written with final /r/, differently from 1.5 above.

/r[̣]ɔj/ '100', no tonal marker.

The orthography in the present letter, besides being old-fashioned, is also extremely inconsistent. The usage of the superscript vowels, including the general i/y symbol, is completely haphazard. The tonal marker /májʔèeg/ is not used, but the identical /fonthɔŋ/ indicates (inconsistently) /a(ʔ)/ or /o/. The tonal marker /májthoo/ is identical with /májhan ʔaakâad/, while the /fannuu/ occasionally marks the /o/, or is added above the consonant preceding /sârâʔ ʔɔɔ/. Several now obsolete ligatures are employed.

Translation of the Siamese text

- 1.1. This is a letter from the Nabob, the Lord Grand Minister of the Treasury in the mighty city of Krungthep, with kindness
2. and affection to (John?) Brown, Danish officer who is the Governor of Tranquebar, to the effect that, in accordance with
3. H.M. the King and Supreme Ruler's order and
4. command uttered by him; during this monsoon
5. of the Year of the Monkey, the Eighth year of the Decade, Captain Leit went to arrange for the purchase of 1000 flintlock guns in the city of Tranquebar and has reported back
6. to H.M. and made delivery. As the King now wishes further 10,000 guns, so
7. I have charged Captain Leit with sailing to Tranquebar and arranging for the purchase there. I ask you, Lord Governor of Tranquebar,
8. for the sake of H.M.'s friendship to be good enough to assist and take care of arranging for Captain Leit
9. to acquire the 10,000 guns and get them safely here. If you, Lord Governor of Tranquebar, should want tin
10. you may arrange for a ship to come and receive the tin through Captain Leit in Phuket, delivering 6 guns per
11. load. If you should want ivory, wood, or other kinds of merchandise from the mighty city of Krungthep, Captain
12. Leit is informed about the price. Please arrange for the ship to load the guns and carry them to the mighty city of Krungthep.
13. We shall calculate the price in full agreement with the total value of the guns so that there is no deficit or inadequate pay. Furthermore,
14. if you, Lord Governor of Tranquebar, will arrange for the ship to carry various sorts of cloth and silk as well as *other merchandise*

- 1.15. to be traded in the mighty city of Krungthep, then as for the price of the cloth (as compared to) the price of ivory, wood, and other merchandise
16. in the mighty city of Krungthep, Captain Leit is already informed about it. Please arrange for the ship to be loaded and carry
17. the merchandise here. We shall assist and see to it that none whatsoever of your merchandise, Lord Governor of Tranquebar, will remain unsold.
18. This letter was written on Tuesday, the First Lunar Month, the Tenth Day of the Waning Moon, in the Year 1138 of the Lesser Era, the Year of the Monkey, in the Eighth Year of the Decade.

Notes to the translation

1.1. 'Nabob'. The Siamese form is /náwàab/, very close to Urdu nawāb*, and Malay nawab*. The usage of this Mogul title does not seem to have been common in Thailand; it is not recorded in the dictionaries.

'Minister of the Treasury'. /klaŋ/ is the Treasury, but the actual function of this official was, at the time, more like a Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Portuguese version says 'primeiro Ministro'.

'Krungthep'. In 1776, when this letter was written, the capital was at Thonburi, alternatively called T'anaburi and Dhonburi (see Hall 1966). Taksin installed himself as king in Thonburi in 1767; Chakri was crowned in Bangkok, across the river, in 1794).

1.2. '(John?) Brown'. The Siamese text says /joon broon (or bruan)/. The name of the Governor of Tranquebar in 1776 was David Brown, a member of a Scottish family which had settled in Denmark. David Brown lived from 1734 till 1804 and was Governor of Tranquebar for the period 14 February 1775 - 17 January 1779. His elder brother John Brown (1723-1808) was a well-known merchant and shipowner. In 1776 the Danish king bestowed upon

* nawāb, from the broken plural of the Arabic naib 'deputy' was treated as a singular by the Persians, and exported as such by them. (See also Yule 1886:467a-9a). (Ed.).

him the honorary title of Commissioner-General of War. John Brown served as a member of the Board of Directors of the (Danish) Asiatic Company in 1770-75 and 1779-85; he carried on private shipping with East India from 1774. It seems that the author of the letter had somehow mixed up the two brothers. Tranquebar was Danish from 1624 till 1845.

7.3. 'The King of Siam' was Phaya Taksin (1767-1782).

7.5. 'Captain Leit'. The Siamese text has /lè(e)g/, but the Portuguese translation says Leit. The final /-g/ may have seemed more natural to the Thai letter writer, since there is no Thai word /lèd/. Were the Captain a Dane, Leth would be a likely guess, but cf. to 7.5 of the Portuguese translation. As regards the calendar terms, see 7.18 below.

7.10. 'Phuket'. The Siamese text has /thālāaŋ/, i.e. Ujong Salang or Junk-Ceylon (see Yule 1886:361b).

7.11. 'Load'. The Siamese text says /phaaraa/ from Skt. bhāra (= 20 tulā or 'quintals').

'Wood'. The Siamese /n̄yāmāj/ means the 'flesh' or grain of the wood, the wood stripped of the bark. The Portuguese translation makes it clear that the fragrant 'eagle-wood' is meant.

7.15. 'Other merchandise'. The letter says only /sīn/ 'goods', the equivalent of /Sīnkhāa/ in 7.11 and 14.

7.18. The 'Lesser Era' (L.E.) or Minor Era /cunlāsāgkārāad/ began in A.D. 638, so L.E. 1138 = A.D. 1776 or 'Buddhist Era' (B.E.) 2319.

'Year of the Monkey'. /pii wōg/ is the ninth year in the cycle of twelve.

'Eighth Year'. /ʔādthāsōg/ is the eighth year in the cycle of ten.

Siam
as Regras. V. 6. Exalt.^{mo} D.^{no}

Supor-te esperando a boa aceitação, receba V.^{ra} estas minhas regras com algum
carinho, deixando em primeiro Lugar Logre V.^{ra} prosperar, e feliz. Saude com muitos
aumentos, e ages de felicidades de dias em dias maiores no seu nobre Estado, e feliz
governo.

Veio nesta monção o Capitão M.^{re} Leit neste Reino de Siam, e fez som-
baya à S. Magestade, que elle dito Capitão tem comprado em Trangabar mil Espin-
gardas, e apresentou à S. Magestade, e S. Magestade ficou bastantemente contente
com as ditas Espingardas. De prezencia S. Real Magestade executou ordem
anim primeira, Ministro de S. Magestade que escrevesse esta Carta a V.^{ra} pedindo que
favoreça ao dito Capitão M.^{re} Leit em Trangabar, porque vai o dito Capitão M.^{re} Leit
com ordem expressa de S. Magestade procura mais dez mil Espingardas em Trangabar.
pelo preço das boas amizade, que o Capitão L.^{re} com a facultade de V.^{ra} se ache elle dito
Capitão M.^{re} Leit as ditas dez-mil Espingardas, e se V.^{ra} quizer Calam mande barco
de V.^{ra} a Jonk Seilao receber Calam das mãos de Capitão M.^{re} Leit, elle dito se entre-
gará por seis Espingardas, hum bar de Calam, e se quizer Marfim, Aquilla, e mais fazen-
das deste Reino de Siam, o Capitão M.^{re} Leit entende, e sabe o preço das ditas fazendas, e
V.^{ra} mande trazer Espingardas no bario de V.^{ra} a este Reino de Siam, e chegando se ajus-
tará as contas puntualmente das ditas Espingardas sem difficuldade alguma, e se praz V.^{ra}
mandar barco a este Reino de Siam o preço das roupas, e pebas, e o Capitão M.^{re} Leit sabe
ja o preço dos ditos panes, e pebas, e o Capitão M.^{re} Leit sabe o preço de Mar-
fim, e outras mais fazendas de este Reino de Siam, pode V.^{ra} mandar barco a commerciar
neste Reino, e nos Ministros de S. Magestade de Siam ajudar, e beneficiar as ditas fa-
zendas, e satisfazer puntualmente. — Como por horas não se offerece mais fiamos
apprecando a V.^{ra} a vida, saude com muitos progressos de bens, e felicidades como lhe de-
ja com devidos respeito que se lhe deve.

Siam aos 7 de Dezenbro de 1777



De V.^{ra}
Todo Affetuoso
Assignamos com nosso selo.

The Portuguese version

Excellentissimo Senhor

- 1.1. Supost esperando a boa aceitação, receba V.E.^a estas minhas regras, com alguma
2. caricia, deitando em primeiro Lugar Logre V.E.^a prospera, e felix saude com muitos
3. augmentos e [a?]lges de felicidades de dia em dia maiores no seu nobre Estado, e feliz
4. governo.
5. Veio nesta monção o Capitão M.^r Leit neste Reino de Siam, e fez som-
6. baya a S. Majestade, que elle dito Capitão tem comprado em Trangabar mil espin-
7. gardas e apresentou a S. Majestade, e S. Majestade ficou bastantemente conten-
8. te com as ditas Espingardas: de presente S. Real Majestade executou ordem
9. a mim primeiro Ministro de S. Majestade que escrevesse esta Carta a V.E.^a pedindo que
10. favoreça ao dito Capitão M.^r Leit em Trangabar, porque vai o dito Capitão M.^r Leit
11. com ordem expressa de S. Majestade procurar mais dez-mil Espingardas em Trangabar:
12. peço a V.E.^a por boa amizade, que o Capitão Leit com a faculdade de V.E.^a se ache elle dito
13. Capitão Leit as ditas dez-mil Espingardas, e se V.E.^a quizer Calaem mande barco
14. de V.E.^a a Jonkseilão receber Calaem das mãos de Capitão M.^r Leit, elle dito se entre-
15. garâ por seis Espingardas, hum bar de Calaem, e se quizer marfim, aguilla, e mais fazem-
16. das deste Reino de Siam, o Capitão M.^r Leit entende, e sabe o preço das ditas fazendas, e

- 2.17. V.E.^a mande trazer espingardas no barco de V.E.^a a este Reino de Siam, e chegando se ajus-
18. tarã as contas puntualmente das ditas espingardas sem difficuldade alguã; e se praz V.E.^a
19. mandar barco à este Reino de Siam o preço das roupas, e pessos, etc. o Capitão M.^r Leit sabe
20. ja o preço dos ditos panos, e pessos, etc. e tambem o dito Capitão M.^r Leit sabe o preço de mar-
21. fim, e outras mais fazendas deste Reino de Siam, pode V.E.^a mandar barco a comenciar
22. neste Reino, e nós Ministro de S. Majestade de Siam ajudar, e beneficiar as ditas fa-
23. zendas, e satisfazer puntualmente. -- Ecomo por horas não se offerece mais ficamos
24. apprecando a V.E.^a muita vida, saude com maiores progressos de bens, e felicidades como lhe dize-
25. ja com devidos respeitos quem sempre he

De V.E.^a

Todo affectuozo

Assignamos com nosso sello

Siam a os 7: de Dezembro de 1776

Notes to the Portuguese version

2.1. V.E.^a, i.e. Vossa Excellencia

Lugar Logre. In the transcript, the capitalization of the original has more or less been followed, and these two words are clearly capitalized in the original. There are, however, quite a few cases where it has been impossible to decide whether an initial consonant represents a stylistically enlarged small letter or a true capital. For the interpretation, this, luckily, plays no role.

2.3. [a?]ges. Because of a fold in the paper, the word is not clearly legible.

l.5. M.^r, i.e. Mister. Ms Diana Matias has kindly called to my attention the recent article by Professor E.H.S. Simmonds (*Bull. Sch. Or. Afr. Stud.* 50 (3), 1987, 529-531) entitled 'A letter in Thai from Thalang in 1777' which describes a transaction very similar to the one treated in the present article. No doubt our Capitão Leit is identical with Captain Francis Light in the 1777 letter. In both letters the Siamese transcription is /lèg/ with /hṣṇ nam/. See also Professor Simmonds' article for further bibliographic information on Francis Light.

l.15. hum, i.e. um.

l.18. alguã, i.e. alguma.

l.19. pessos, i.e. peças.

l.20. panos, i.e. pannos.

l.24. apprecando, i.e. apreçando

muita and maiores are written by means of ligatures. The first one could perhaps be read melhora instead of muita.

Translation of the Portuguese version

Most excellent Sir

- 7.1. Hoping for your kind acknowledgement, I ask your Excellency to receive these lines of mine with some
2. favour, while at the same time I express the wish that you may enjoy a prosperous and joyous health with much
3. success and plenty of happiness increasing day by day in your noble state and felicitous
4. government.
5. During this present monsoon the Captain Mr. Leit arrived in this Kingdom of Siam and paid
6. obeisance to His Majesty, [reporting] that he, the said captain, had bought one thousand flintlocks in Tranquebar,
7. and he delivered them to His Majesty, and His Majesty was rather satisfied
8. with the said flintlocks: now His Majesty has issued an order
9. to me, His Majesty's Prime Minister, to write this letter to Your Excellency, asking you
10. to favour the said Captain Mr. Leit in Tranquebar, so that he
11. with His Majesty's express order shall procure further 10,000 flintlocks in Tranquebar:
12. I ask Your Excellency, for the sake of good friendship, that Captain Leit through your authority acquires
13. the said 10,000 flintlocks, and if Your Excellency wants tin,
14. send a ship of yours to Junk-Ceylon to receive tin from the hands of Captain Mr. Leit, who
15. in exchange for six flintlocks will deliver one load of tin, and if you wish ivory, eagle-wood and other merchandise
16. from this Kingdom of Siam, Captain Mr. Leit is acquainted with them and knows the price of the said merchandise, and

- 1.17. Your Excellency should order the transfer of the flintlocks on your boat to this Kingdom of Siam, and when they arrive
18. the accounts for the said flintlocks will be settled without any difficulty; and if it pleases your Excellency
19. to send a ship to this Kingdom of Siam, [as regards] the price of linens, firearms, etc., Captain Mr. Leit knows
20. already the price of the said cloth, firearms, etc. And as the said Captain Mr. Leit also knows the price of ivory,
21. and other further merchandise of this Kingdom of Siam, Your Excellency can direct a ship to trade
22. in this Kingdom, and we, Minister to His Majesty of Siam, [will] assist and facilitate the said dealings,
23. and give satisfaction punctually. -- And since, for the time being, there are no more items of business at hand, we shall continue
24. to esteem highly a long life for Your Excellency, good health and greatest progress in possessions and happiness, such as
25. with due respect we wish for you that it may always be.

Your Excellency's
devotedly

we endorse with our seal

Siam, the seventh of December, 1776

Notes to the translation

1.3. 'plenty of'. This translation is based on a reading auges 'apogee', for [a?]ges, suggested to me by Luis de Vasconcelos.

1.6. 'obeisance'. Translates sombaya, probably from Malay sembah or sembahyang.

7.12. 'friendship'. From the Portuguese version of the letter one could gain the impression that the Minister and the Governor were well acquainted. The Siamese original says, however, expressly, 'His Majesty's friendship'.

7.13. 'tin'. The term is calaem, from Arabic.

7.14. 'Junk-Ceylon', i.e. Phuket, from Malay Ujong Salang. (See also Yule 1886:361(b).)

7.15. 'load'. The Portuguese version uses bar, corresponding to the Siamese original /phara/, both from Skt. bhāra.

'eagle-wood' translates Portuguese aguilla. (See also Yule 1886:258ab who traces the word to Malayalam.).

7.19. 'firearms' translates the Portuguese peças 'pieces, firearms', here evidently referring to the flintlocks already mentioned.

7.24. 'long' translates muita. If we read melhora instead, the meaning will be 'best possible'.

'devotedly'. The Portuguese says todo affectuozo 'totally devoted'.

NOTE

1. I have benefited from correspondence with Dr Theraphan L. Thongkum and, through her, Professor Preecha Changkhwanyuen, concerning the Siamese text; as well as with Palle Kroman M.A. and, through him, Lecturer Luis de Vasconcelos, concerning the Portuguese text. The final responsibility is, in all cases, my own.

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- & A.C. Burnell

