

A SIAMESE LETTER DATED 7 DECEMBER 1776

Søren Egerod

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? khlan/ 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. nǎṅsŷy nǎwǎabthāncāwphájaaphrá?khlanphūujàjná?krunṭhêebphrá?-
máhāanákhoon miimáthúra?
2. cǐdsānǐdsānēhāa maathēṅjōṅṅbrōonsēenaacāwdiinmág-
phūupencāwmyanṭraṅkaabāad dūa,j
3. phrá?bāadsōmdēdphrá?máhāakrāsādtraathíráadcāwthīisūṅjâj
miiphrá?rāadchá?oṅkaanmaan

- 7.4. phrá?banthuunsùrásíñhànâaddamrâdnÿaklâwnÿakràmdòmsàñwâa
ná?moorásùm
5. piiwîog?âdthàsògkâpitanlèg?ðogmaacàdsÿpyynná?myañtrañ-
kaabâadphanbðogkhâwpa,jthuun
6. klâwthuunkràmdòmhâwâaj tðñphrá?râadchâprâsðñpyynkhâab-
silaa?iigmÿynbðog cyñ
7. tèñhâjkâpitanlèg?ðogmaacàdsÿyná?myañtrañkaabâad
khðohâjçâwmyañtrañkaa
8. bâadhënkèèsthaañphrá?râadchâmajtrii leemajtriichûaj-
thamnú?bamruñçâdcèèñhâjkâpitan
9. lègdâjpyynmÿynbðogkâwmaacoñsàdùag thâacâwmyañtrañ-
kaabâadcâ?tðñkaandiibùg
10. kð?hâj tèñkâmpânkhâwmaaráb?awdiibùgkèèkâpitanlègná?-
myañthâlâañhðogbðogtðo
11. phaaraa thâacâ?tðñkaañçaaçhâañnyâmájsĩnkhâasĩñda,jná?-
kruñthèebphrá?mâhâanákhòonkâpì
12. tanlègrúuraakhaajùuléew hâj tèñkâmpânbanthúgpyynkhâw-
maasðñdâjthèañkruñthèebphrá?
13. mâhâanákhòoncâ?khídraakhaahâjkhrobtamcamnuankhâapyyn-
mí?hâjkhâañkèonkhâdsòñjùudâj præ
14. kaannÿñthâacâwmyañtrañkaabâadcâ?tèñkâmpânbanthúgphan-
phâaphrèèphansĩnkhâakhâw
15. pajkhâakhâajná?kruñthèebphrá?mâhâanákhòon leeraakhaa-
phanphâaraakhaañçaaçhâañnyâmájsĩn
16. ná?kruñthèebphrá?mâhâanákhòonnán kâpitanlègrúuléew-
hâj tèñkâmpânbanthúgkhâw
17. pajthèèdrawcâ?chûajthamnú?bamruñmí?hâjphanphâasĩnkhâa-
khðoñçâwmyañtrañkaabâadkhâadkhâañjùudâjpen?ankhâad
18. thiidiawnãñsÿymaaná?wan?añkhaandyan?âajrèemsìb-
khâmcunlâsâgkârâadphanrðojsâamsìbèèdpiiwîog?âdthàsòg

Notes to the text

7.1 /nãñsÿ/ 'letter'. The /a/ is written by means of the diacritical sign which is now reserved for the tonal marker /mâjthoo/. In this letter no distinction is made between /mâjñhã ?aakâad/ and /mâjthoo/. This will not be pointed out

in every single case in the following notes.

/nāwāab/ '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 /wāab/ was a noun designating something like 'residence, domicile'. But cf. /nākhoon/ below.

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

/cāw/ '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/.

/nākhoon/ 'city'. The first syllable is spelt with /nɔɔ neen/ rather than with /nɔɔ nuu/, 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 /sāràʔ ʔyʔ/ plus modern /májʔèeg/ (a combination of /sāràʔ ʔiʔ/ with both /jàadnámkháaŋ/ and /fõnthooŋ/). 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'.

/máthúráʔ/ '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.

7.2 /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.

/sānìd/ 'amiable' is spelt with final /cɔɔ caan/ instead of /thoo thāhān/ or /thoo thoŋ/, the vowel is written with the general i/y.

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