

THE EARLY POSTAL HISTORY OF THAILAND.

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INTRODUCTION

1. *Postal History as Part of General History.*

Up to the end of the XIX century it was generally held that history is a record of past politics, of past wars, conquering expeditions or military aggressions. During the last thirty or forty years, however, scientists gradually began to realise that human life, past and present, is manifold, is absolutely based on the most contradicting features and facts, on geographical situation, on food, and on communications. The development of a nation can be influenced so highly from without, that a responsible historian is necessarily bound to consider continuously every possible part of human activity for obtaining an utmost realistic picture.

This new aspect necessarily leads to the conclusion that the *spiritual relations* between the individuals which form a nation, the communication between capital and provincial towns and villages of a certain country, the exchange of letters, presents and tributes of the governments themselves, are some of the most interesting sources for historical research. Evidently they are one of the bases to prove sometimes fundamental theories. We are obliged, as another consequence, to acknowledge the development of the *technical side of the communications*, i. e., the development of posts, telegraphs and telephones, of radio-communications, railway, shipping and air-traffic, as being an essential part of human life, as an integral element of the growth of mankind.

From all these I shall choose for the present study the development of the modern postal service within the boundaries of Thailand. And within this very waste, complicated and rather obstinate subject only the period of its childhood shall be particularly considered, that means the time from its beginning, in the middle of the past century, to the adherence to the Universal Postal Union by the Postal Administration of Thailand, in 1885.

A. POSTAL CONDITIONS IN THAILAND UP TO THE MIDDLE OF THE XIX CENTURY.

1. *The Inland Service.*

a. Official Service.

The inland mail service of the Thai Government in its state up to the middle of the XIX century must be looked at as originating with the administrative reforms carried out by *King Trailok*, (1448-1488) (1), who created five civil ministries. One of these particularly cared for the transportation of government letters.

A description of the organisation of the official inland mail given in 1925 by the Ministry of Communications states as follows :

"Prior to the establishment of Post and Telegraph services in the Kingdom of Siam, epistolary correspondence was conveyed by various methods in accordance with old usage.

"For the inland service the transmission of official letters was arranged under two categories:—*viz.* ordinary and urgent . .

"An ordinary message was forwarded from one province to another.

"An urgent message was conveyed by special courier. The courier was provided with means of conveyance through whatever province he had to go.

"Alterations and improvements in the above practice were made at the time when H. R. H. Prince Damrong became Minister of the Interior. Each important town was provided with regular couriers, whose duties were to despatch messages from town to town and to entrust same to fresh couriers,

For instance, in case of an urgent message intended for Nagor Rajasima, the Bangkok courier had to convey it only to Saraburi. After handing the message to a fresh courier at that place his duties ended. The successive couriers took charge of the message and carried it to its destination."

We see here, consequently, a vivid description of a well-organised relay-system as it was in use in Europe in the XV, XVI and XVII cen-

(1) see: W. A. R. Wood: *A History of Siam*, Bangkok 1938, p. 85.

turies. With regard to the *messengers* themselves we find some particulars in another publication of the Ministry of Commerce and Communications, from which I should like to quote the following passages : (2)

"The Governor of each town maintained a number of couriers who knew the quickest routes to all neighbouring cities. Important towns also had special couriers who were versed in travel to distant cities with which they had business connection. In the Capital the Central Government maintained a large number of couriers to run to all the cities surrounding the metropolis, and a group of special couriers who knew the quickest way to every city in the Kingdom."

The same work gives also some remarkable hints with regard to the routes. (3)

"The routes were well marked and known to all. Rest-houses were provided along the routes, which were kept in order by the people. The couriers were treated with respect, and if they carried the King's letters special treatment was afforded them on the routes. For urgent and important messages special couriers made the entire trip, and it was the duty of the towns along the route to provide them with fresh ponies and other facilities for reaching their destination."

In this connection we must also consider the fact that the king as well as many nobles in ancient Thailand up to the middle of the past century had a *monopoly of trade* in most of the exported or imported goods. They were, consequently, for the despatch of orders for delivery or informations with regard to stocks, absolutely dependent on a reliable system of letter-carrying.

This commercial activity on the part of the official world unavoidably led to numerous difficulties as soon as foreign embassies visited Thailand for the purpose of concluding treaties of peace and commerce. (4) The European and American countries, particularly their merchants, needed the goods growing here, they needed on the other hand markets for their own products, and for the safe-guarding

(2) see: *Siam: Nature and Industry*. Issued by the Ministry of Commerce and Communications, Bangkok, 1930, Chapter XX, p. 285, seq.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 285.

(4) see: Sir John Bowring: *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, London, 1857, Vol. II, p. 281.

of both, they needed a safe and reliable mail service. They were deeply interested in a free trade which was contrary to the interests of the holders of the monopolies.

The mail despatching organisation of Thailand during that time was, consequently, not free from *other influences*. The needs, however, of western commerce could by no means rely on ponies, rowing boats and slowly-walking elephants for the distribution of letters. On the other hand the foreign traders were highly interested in spreading as far as possible over the country but had, according to the various treaties (5) for the first period of ten years to settle only at Bangkok. They could travel around but were forbidden to purchase land or houses outside the capital. These merchants, consequently, looked too for a regular, reliable and quick mail service, as their very life depended on not being cut off from the most important town of the country, from the main harbour and from their political representative and protector.

The result of these conditions was, at a relatively early time, the fixing of *special terms* within the respective treaties of peace and commerce to secure a mail service according to European views of transportation. We find, therefore, in the *Treaty between the Honorable East India Company and Their Majesties the First and Second King of Siam*, concluded in 1826, by Captain Burney on the part of the East India Co., Article XI which secured "transmission of letters from one part of the country to the other." (6)

Twenty-nine years later, *i. e.* in 1855, Sir John Bowring, who at that time was Governor-General of Hong Kong and British Minister to the Court of Peking, succeeded in concluding a final agreement the famous *Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Great Britain and Siam*; signed April 12th, 1855; ratified April 5th, 1856. Here the Article XI expressly indicates that amongst other regulations of the Burney Treaty, Article XI shall not be abrogated, whereas Articles 6 and 10 were modified.

(5) see: Treaty of Thailand with the United States (1836), Art. IV; Treaty of Thailand with Denmark (1838), Art. V; Tratado de Amisade, Comercio Navegacao (between Thailand and Portugal, 1859), Art. XI; XII; Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Siam and the Netherlands (1860), Art. V; Treaty of Peace and Commerce between Prussia and Siam (1862) Art. V.

(6) see: Sir John Bowring, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 202.

b. Private Letter Distribution.

Private persons and officials for their personal affairs had their own means of communication. This resulted in the employment of *private messengers* which were occasionally sent by people writing letters. All the traders and private persons kept their own couriers and employed them according to their own necessities. (7)

We can, however, presume that conditions with regard to this matter were quite similar to those of the Middle Ages in Europe. Here the *Guilds* spreading over large territories, employed their own messengers independent of imperial or royal postal organisations. Besides that *monks* to a large extent carried not only papal bulls, orders, ordinances or letters of the Catholic Church and its institutions, but also messages from and to private persons. The postal organisation of the famous Counts of Thurn and Taxis (in the old German Empire), of the Kings of England, of France or of the Italian Princes proved to be quite unable to claim a prerogative, not to speak of a *religia*, for the postal service within their respective territories. On the contrary several of these private postal establishments gradually turned out to be extremely reliable. (8)

The already mentioned Thai messengers were originally slaves or sometimes free employees of rich people who sent letters to their relatives or for commercial purposes. There was, consequently, *no special fee* for each letter to be paid because the messenger did not earn his living from this business of letter-carrying only, as he did also other work for his master.

It is also reported that these private messengers made use of the same routes and of the same rest-houses on their way through the country. (9)

(7) see: *Postal Progress in Siam 1885-1925*, p. 3; *Siam: Nature and Industry*, p. 285.

(8) see: *The Penny-Post of William Dockwra, in London; the Provincial Penny Posts in Middle and Northern England; the Local Carriers in the United States; the numerous private postal societies and establishments in Germany; or the Semstwo Posts in Russia.*

(9) see: *Siam, Nature and Industry*, p. 285.

3. *Foreign Service.*

The connection between Thailand and foreign countries existed at that time mainly by sea though there were also some possibilities of land routes to Burma in the West, to China in the North, to Indo-China in the East, and to the Malay Peninsula in the South. As, however, foreign mail chiefly consisted of correspondence of high Thai officials for the sake of their trade monopolies and of that of foreigners who lived mainly in or near Ayuthya, or later in or near Bangkok, the *way by sea* was the most frequented.

We see, consequently, during the period in question numerous British, Danish, Portuguese, and French vessels calling at Bangkok or Penang. We see also the vessels of the Thai kings and nobles not only carrying goods, but the necessary mail. Their visits, as they all were at that time only *sailing ships*, was highly dependent on the trade winds, *i. e.*, on the North-East Monsoon in spring and on the South-East Monsoon in autumn. On the other hand it is quite impossible to give for the time being any particular dates about organisation of this mail service which was entirely subject to strictly private agreements and arrangements. Winds, loaded goods, nationality of the vessels dictated time and destination, and the good-will of the captains was more important than urgency of the letters.

B. EARLY TREATIES AND FOREIGN POSTAL ACTIVITY (1858-1885).

1. *New Economical Situation and its Consequences.*

The effect of the two treaties mentioned before was the *Agreement entered into between the uudermentioned Royal Commissioners on the Part of Their Majesties the First and Second Kings of Siam and Harry Smith Parkes, Esquire, on the Part of Her Britannic Majesty's Government*, dated 13th May, 1856. Another effect was the extension of the number of British traders and their employees, the extension of the exchange of goods, and, as a necessary consequence the extension of mail too.

At this stage of affairs the means hitherto used of handling of mail, as far as the transmission from Thailand to abroad was concerned,

proved to be absolutely insufficient. The organisation hitherto maintained, *i. e.*, the thoroughly occasional character of transporting letters from Bangkok to their Eastern or Western Asiatic or European and other destinations soon turned out to be too slow, not frequent enough, and too unreliable. The main problem was, however, that none of the three named agreements literally dealt with the question of letter-transmission with regard to foreign mail.

2. *Hong Kong Postal Service at Bangkok (1858-1885).*

Ways, however, were soon found to check this dilemma, and it must be maintained that Sir John Bowring who at that time was Governor-General of Hong Kong, was the initiator of the respective improvement. This was realized by inaugurating a real postal service by aid of the newly established Consulate-General in Bangkok. The then Postmaster General of Hong Kong, S. B. C. Ross, later on published an interesting article in which he says:—(10)

“a kind of unrecognized agency of the Hong Kong Post Office had been maintained at the Consulate-General, Bangkok, where Hong Kong stamps were sold and letters could be registered.”

This statement must, though coming from an official source, nevertheless be looked at as quite inexact. The service is said to have started in 1858; (11) we can see, however, from every postage stamp catalogue that stamps were not introduced in the colony of Hong Kong before December, 1862. The Kohl-Handbook, furthermore, states that special obliterations of Hong Kong stamps used in Bangkok were only found from 1883 to 1885.

We are, consequently, bound to divide the postal activity of the Consulate-General chronologically into *three periods, i. e.* :—

(1) from 1858 to the end of 1862 : acceptance and despatch of letters only by indicating the postal fee by pen or pencil ;

(2) from 1863 to 1893 : handling of letters by franking them with Hong Kong stamps ; the obliteration took place only at their arrival at Hong Kong ,

(10) see : Postmaster General S. B. C. Ross : *Notes on the British Postal Agencies*, in *Stamp Collectors Fortnightly*, 29th Sept., 1923.

(11) see : Dr. Herbert Munk : *Kohl-Briefmarken-Handbuch*, Berlin, 1936, Vol. V. p. 222.

(3) from 1883 to 1885: handling of letters by franking them with Hong Kong postage stamps and cancelling them with a special obliterator containing the inscription BANGKOK and the date in a circle of 26 mm. diameter.

The letters of the second and third period sometimes also showed a large black seal with the British arms and the inscription BRITISH CONSULATE BANGKOK. By this measure the stamps could not be stolen. Nothing is known up to now with regard to the postal rates charged at that time.

In this connection it must be borne in mind that the handling of mail by British Consulates was quite a general custom. If we study carefully the development of *British Post Offices outside the British Empire*, especially in Central and South America, in the Near and Middle East and in some parts of Africa, we see that British Consulates-General, Consulates and Vice-Consulates were ordered to accept mail for despatch, to use British postage stamps and obliterators, to fix special postal rates for transportation to England herself and to various other European countries.

3. *Straits Settlements Postal Service at Bangkok (1882-1885).*

As already mentioned the Postal Service described went to eastern places, *i. e.*, Hong Kong, and from there to Shanghai, Swatow, Canton, Tientsin, Japan, etc. The *mail to western ports, i. e.*, to all harbours west of Singapore, this harbour included, was up to 1882 only handled after the manner of the eastern mail up to 1862.

The growing quantity of mail sent in this direction as well as the remarkable improvement in the general postal conditions in India and other British territories, however, necessarily required a considerable change in the treatment of the mail from Thailand to western destinations. Though Thailand herself, as will be explained later, made already energetic preparations to establish a postal organisation of her own, this foreign mail service urgently needed more security and regulations with regard to speed, rates, prepayment and transportation.

The result of these considerations was a special arrangement between the Governments of Thailand and the Straits Settlements, early in 1882,

which secured all these improvements and facilities. It embraced the handling of all mail from Thailand destined for the West.

The literature at this moment available unfortunately gives no particulars concerning arrival and departure of *mail boats* or regarding *rates* from Bangkok to Singapore, India, or European countries via Suez or via Cape of Good Hope. We know, however, that especially low rates were later introduced for letters to England via Marseilles. (12)

To facilitate the prepayment of these rates *special postage stamps* were sent from Singapore to Bangkok. They consisted of the stamps then in use in the Straits Settlements, but with an overprinted B. At the opening of this new service which took place on the 1st September, 1882, the values of 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 24, 30 and 96 cents were put on sale. No particulars are *likewise* at present available concerning the number of stamps overprinted. Originally there must have been large stocks of supply prepared but most of the stamps are now lost. To-day they are extremely scarce, and most of the copies offered, perhaps eighty per cent, are *forgeries*.

There is a very interesting remark given by Colonel G. E. Gerini in his *Catalogue of the Siamese Section at the International Exhibition of Industry and Labour*, held in Turin in 1911; there the author says with regard to these stamps and their use :—(13)

“They could be purchased in this form at a trifle more than cost price, the surcharge being devoted to defraying the cost of carrying the said correspondence by merchant steamers to Singapore.”

(12) From the treaties about India in the *Kohl-Briefmarken-Handbuch*, vol. I. we learn only the following figures :—

1859-1863 :	Singapore to Penang	2 Annas	(see p. 484)
	Singapore to India	4 Annas	(see p. 485)
1866 :	India to England via Marseilles	6 A. 8 P.	(see p. 486)
1882 :	dto. dto. dto.	6 A. 6 P.	(see p. 488)

There was, however, an additional rate from Bangkok to Singapore of 2 or 4 Annas, which, in 1867, when the Dollar and Cents Currency was introduced in the Colony, was changed into its equivalent in cents.

(13) see: Col. G. E. Gerini: *Catalogue etc.* p. 67-68.

Though Colonel Gerini by giving in his Catalogue a short postal history of this country, and though showing at this exhibition *hors concours* an extensive stamp collection, proves to be well acquainted with the material in question, this remark is extremely superficial and inexact; it does not allow any conclusions except that there was no special postal fee for the route Singapore-Bangkok or Bangkok-Singapore, but only something like a tip for the captains going and coming.

On the 1st July, 1885. the Postal Administration of Thailand joined the Universal Postal Union. Both the Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements mail services through the British Consulate-General were consequently *suspended*. Also this act was done by mutual agreement; and when we compare this development with the already described postal activity of the other British Consulates, we must see quite analogous events. (14) In all these cases, as it was then in Thailand, the respective postal administrations had joined the Universal Postal Union.

C. THE EARLY THAI POSTAL SERVICE (1883-1885).

1. Preparations.

After this somewhat long but necessary incursion into the pre-1883 postal activities in Bangkok we come to the handling of postal affairs by the Thai authorities.

During all the years from the middle of the past century the Thai Government knew that the day would surely come when they would have to take the entire postal service into their own hands. In 1866, when the New York agent of the well-known stamp printing firm of De La Rue & Co., London, came over from the United States and offered

(14) A short survey with regard to this problem taken from the respective descriptions in the *Kohl-Briefmarken-Handbuch* shows the following figures:—

The British Consular Post Offices were closed for the said reason:

1877 in Cuba, Fernando Po, Puerto Rico;

1879 in Peru;

1880 in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela;

1891 in Chile, Columbia, Haiti;

1882 in Nicaragua.

to supply Thailand with postage stamps similar to those then in use in England, the time had not yet come and the offer was declined. (15)

By and by, however, affairs got into some shape, and in 1881 H. M. King Chulalongkorn appointed his younger brother, H. R. H. Prince Bhanurangi as Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, at the same time creating a new Ministry for the said purpose. The most important duty of the new minister was the preparation for establishing a modern Thai postal service, at first within the limits of the capital, then extending it gradually all over the country. In his birthday speech on the 21st September, 1881, His Majesty gave very detailed explanations regarding the purpose and character of this new service. (16)

2. The Bangkok Postal Service.

Only after two more years were regulations fixed so far as to be able to meet the demands of a modern postal service. And on Saturday, the 4th August, 1883, or on the first day of the waxing moon of the ninth month of the year of the Goat, fifth of the decade, of the year 1245 of of the civil era, the doors of the Thai Post Offices opened for the first time.

For this purpose the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs issued a very detailed *Notification*. He referred to the speech made two years previously by H. M. King Chulalongkorn predicting the inauguration of the said Service; then he gave all the particulars of the Service itself which should enable the yet unaccustomed population to become acquainted with the new institution.

Then followed the *Regulations*. The Regulations consisted of seven teen chapters. *Four classes of articles* were fixed, namely:—

1. Written letters in open or closed envelopes;
2. Postcards;
3. Newspapers printed in Bangkok; and
4. Other printed publications in the form of newspapers, books, etc.

Geographically the boundaries of the new service were Samsen in the North, Bankolem in the South, Talat Flu in the West, and Sa Patum in the East.

(15) see: Resinald le May: *Historical Note, in Descriptive Catalogue of the Stamps of Siam*, Bangkok, 1920, p 8.

(16) see: Fred J. Melville, op. cit. p. 11.

There were three mail-deliveries daily throughout this area ; on the other hand a great number of letter-boxes had been placed in all parts of the town to deposit there all the mail to be gathered and distributed.

Special attention must be drawn to the Postal Rates which are an important source for some later investigations. First class mail for instance, *i.e.*, ordinary letters, was charged at 2 atts for the weight of one tical, that is 15. 13 gr., and 1 att for every additional tical of weight. Postcards were sold at the counters at the following rate :

1 postcard	1½ atts
3 postcards	4 atts
6 postcards	8 atts.

The cards had, however, an imprinted stamp of 1 att only. Newspapers were despatched for 1 att per sheet, and all fourth class articles at the rate of one att per tical weight. For any letter on which the postage was not fully prepaid, the addressee was charged with twice the amount of the deficiency.

The important business of sorting the mail, as well as the whole administration, was done at the General Post Office, which at that time was near the Ong Ang Canal that is nowadays near the Memorial Bridge, in a building to-day a part of the Telephone Service.

3. *The First Thai Postage Stamps.*

Considering the means and speed of transportation at the end of the last century it must have been late in 1882 that an order was given by the Thai Minister for Posts and Telegraphs to the firm of *Messrs. Waterlow and Sons, Ltd., London*, to supply the country with the postage stamps necessary for the prepayment of the rates mentioned before. And as hitherto nothing is known with regard to the artists who made the design and who cut the dies, or regarding the choice of the colours to be used, we must assume that Waterlow and Sons were entirely at liberty concerning these particulars. They seem to have obtained only a portrait of H. M. King Chulalongkorn in uniform, looking to the left, an information indicating the various denominations, and the Thai inscriptions to be inserted. None of the ornaments engraved had a particular Thai character, no foreigner unacquainted with the Thai alphabet was able to ascertain the value of a stamp. The printers seem to have absolutely

ignored the simplest principles and rules of international postal law concerning these details.

The *denominations* ordered and received respectively were :—

1 <i>solot</i>	dark blue
1 <i>att</i>	carmine
1 <i>sio</i>	red
1 <i>sik</i>	yellow and
1 <i>salung</i>	brown-orange.

In this connection we must remember that the rather complicated system of currency then in use in Thailand was as follows :—

2 <i>solot</i>	=	1 <i>att</i>
2 <i>atts</i>	=	1 <i>sio</i> or <i>pai</i>
2 <i>sios</i>	=	1 <i>sik</i>
2 <i>siks</i>	=	1 <i>fuang</i>
2 <i>fuangs</i>	=	1 <i>salung</i>
4 <i>salungs</i>	=	1 <i>tical</i>

On the other hand we have a much simpler calculation by dividing the tical into 64 atts. This monetary system was changed, in November, 1908, into one tical, or baht, equal to 100 satangs; that means $1\frac{1}{2}$ atts were approximately equal to 2 satangs.

All the inscriptions on the postage stamps were written in Thai and consisted only of the indication of the value, but omitted the name of the issuing country or administration. The centre showed the portrait of H. M. King Chulalongkorn. Printing sheets contained eighty stamps arranged in ten horizontal rows of eight copies. No marginal indications concerning plates or plate numbers were engraved, as is usual with most stamp printers, and the paper itself shows no watermark. The whole issue consisted of 500,000 sets, or 6,250 sheets of every value. Though there was only one printing, many colour shades are known from every denomination owing to a bad distribution of the colour within the printing machines.

There was, however, a mistake made in so far as these stamps were ordered at a time when the postage rates were not yet fixed. The effect was that the stamp of *one solot could not be used at all*, and that the stock of this denomination was, consequently, kept at the treasury and not sold to the public. Used copies of this stamp, therefore, must have

been obliterated at a later time and with quite different postmarks. Or they are forgeries altogether.

On the other hand there happened a curious incident at the stage of printing just this one solot stamp. Of all the other four stamps only one printing plate was used for all 6,250 sheets. The plate for the one solot stamp, however, must have been damaged in some way, anyhow there was a new plate made, which in turn, became damaged too. It had again to be replaced by a third one, to enable Waterlow to manufacture the mentioned quantity of sheets. There are slight differences recognisable so that the specialist can place a copy as belonging to the first, second, or third plate; besides that there are also slight differences of colour.

There was also a one fuang stamp ordered and printed but never issued. The *Descriptive Catalogue* already mentioned says that

“No satisfactory explanation is forthcoming as to why this stamp was never issued. The reason usually accepted is that it arrived, not with the other values, but at some later date, when its use was no longer required”. (17)

Up to now no other comment concerning this stamp was published. Copies of it are sometimes offered; particulars with regard to size of sheets and numbers printed were not revealed. The colour was a deep vermilion.

4. *Extension of the Postal Service.*

It proved very soon that the Thai Government had done well in establishing a postal service in Bangkok. The size of the postal activity turned out to be satisfying; it gave furthermore, much experience to the Thai officials for being able at some future moment to inaugurate inter-urban communication also.

All this became officially known to the public when King Chulalongkorn made another birthday-speech on the 21st September, 1883, *i. e.*, only six weeks after the opening of this Postal Service. Before an audience of the foreign diplomats who were gathered to express their best wishes in the Grand Palace, His Majesty said:— (18)

(17) see: *Descriptive Catalogue of the Postage Stamps of Siam*, p. 38.

(18) see: R. S. le May, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

"A Post Office now delivers letters with regularity throughout the Capital and its suburbs. The use made of it has surprisingly exceeded Our expectations, as We did not think that Siamese would write so many letters. We are now most desirous to extend the postal service throughout Siam to the great advantage of trade and good government; and when that is done, We hope, as invited by the Postmaster-General of Germany, to extend our correspondence through the world by entering the Postal Union."

Great hopes were there expressed, great projects were there touched, and great intentions explained. And it was, on the other hand, quite understandable, that the German Post master General, *Heinrich von Stephan*, the initiator of the Universal Postal Union, had a vivid interest to see the famous child of his love spread all over the world, a peaceful union which should one day embrace all continents of the globe.

Next year, *i. e.*, on the royal birthday in 1884, H. M. King Chulalongkorn made another proclamation of which curiously two different versions exist. For saving time and space, only the correct one shall be given here. On this occasion the King said:—(19)

"The interior postal organisation of our Capital having been completed, we intend now to extend it to all the provinces watered by the river Menam as far as Chiengrai. Encouraged by the promise which the United States of America, Germany and Switzerland have made of their friendly co-operation, we have accepted their invitation to enter the Universal Postal Union. Nevertheless, the legislation which was necessary was not completed until after the adjournment of the Postal Congress. We do not doubt that this step will be a benefit to all the world in general, and, above all, to our kingdom."

These explanations lead to the conclusion that during the first years of her own postal activity Thailand was already given much attention by some important western countries, and that a regular correspondence held between various postal administrations and that established in

(19) see: Fred J. Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 18. The other version which, curiously enough, is given by R. S. le May in his *Historical Notes*, p. 9, and runs as follows:—"Our internal postal arrangements, which were confined to the Capital, *have now been extended* to all the Provinces along the Menam as far as Chiengmai. Encouraged by the kind offer of assistance from the United States, Germany and Switzerland, we have accepted the invitation to enter the Universal Union."

Bangkok. The German interest has already been mentioned; Switzerland, as the seat of the Central Bureau of the Union, liked to see a growing importance of this institution, and the United States of America had since a long time eagerly looked for an improvement of their own commercial relations with this country.

The next Postal Congress took place at Lisbon in February and March, 1885, and besides other countries, Thailand proposed joining this Union. (20)

In the meantime extensive preparations had been made for extending the postal service along the Menam River; but the inauguration itself of all the post offices took place only a short time after Thailand joined the Union. According to the explanations given by *E. Wyon Smith* in the already mentioned *Descriptive Catalogue* (21) we have to note the following new post offices:

- 26th August, 1885: Paklat and Paknam, with a daily service to Bangkok;
- 1st October, 1885: Bang-Pa-In, for the time when the Royal Court was in residence there;
- 19th October, 1885: Nakon Chaisi, Prapatom, Bang Yang, Tachin, Ratburi and Petchaburi, with a weekly service to Bangkok;
- 26th October, 1885: a fortnightly service between Bangkok and Chiengmai, which on its route touched 21 places; there were, furthermore, postal branches erected at the same date at Banpot Pisai, Kampengpet, Raheng, Sukothai and Sawankalok.

According to Melville (22) the transportation of the mail from Bangkok took 5 days to Paknam Po, 10 days to Raheng, 10 days also to Uttaradit, and 15 days to Chiengmai.

(20) Other countries were Belgian Congo, Bolivia and Tunis.

(21) See: E. Wyon Smith: *The Postmarks of Siam*, in *Descriptive Catalogue of the Postage Stamps of Siam*, p. 96, 97.

(22) See: Fred J. Melville; *Siam, Its Postage Stamps*, p. 27.

5. *Consequences and Conclusions.*

The joining of the Universal Postal Union had some very important consequence for Thailand, which were to alter strongly the character of the various branches of postal activity.

There was, firstly, a new legislation consisting of an Act promulgated 1st July, 1885, and embracing in seven paragraphs and numerous articles all the details of international postal communication, such as the exclusive privilege of the Government for carrying letters, warranty, special penal code for private persons, shipmasters, and officials, etc.

Secondly, special postal rates were fixed for the foreign mail, including especially reduced rates for letters to the Straits Settlements, Sarawak, North Borneo, and China, but higher rates for South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, neither of which joined the Universal Postal Union before 1891 and 1892 respectively.

One of the further effects was the necessity to create new postage stamps which were able to meet the demand of this new service. Three different ways were gradually found. There was, for instance, a rate of 12 atts for ordinary letters within the Postal Union; the registration fee was at the same rate. There were, however, up to now only stamps at 1, 2, 4, 8, and 16 atts available. The latter, the one salung stamp, consequently, was sold from this time on at only 12 atts, a measure which was generally uncommon and scarcely approved of by the public. (23)

Another measure became necessary for creating a one tical stamp; this was done by *overprinting* the hitherto unusable one solot denomination. A hand-stamp was at first used, showing the new value in capitals (1 TICAL), but afterwards, apparently for obtaining a greater stock, three or four more hand-stamps were cut, all of them consisting of mixed letters. Nevertheless the whole number overprinted seems to have been not more than 7000 copies. It is a strange fact that genuinely used

(23) Similar cases are, for instance, known in Germany: during the inflation some of the provisionals were sold from 26th November, 1923, on for some weeks at four times the face value without special indication. ; Led by similar reasons of decline of the currency the postal administration of Indo-China, in 1919, sold its stamps at one half of face value to meet the difference between French and Indo-Chinese Piastre (see: *Kohl-Handbook* vol. v., p. 656). In India the 8 Pies stamp of 1866 was, according to a change of the rates, in 1874, sold at 9 Pies (see: *Kohl-Hand-book*, vol. i, p. 486).

copies are practically unknown. But *forgeries* of the overprint are met with in abundance.

It was not until April, 1887, however, that a *new permanent set* of postage stamps was issued, printed by Messrs. De La Rue and Co., London, satisfying all the wishes of modern international postal laws according to the rules of the Universal Postal Union. Colours, watermark, inscriptions in Thai and English, perforation, design, and paper-treatment before the printing operation, corresponded to the latest inventions and experiences of the time with regard to safeguarding against forgeries, easy distinguishing of the denominations and easy use by the public.

A general improvement within the whole postal administration made it possible for the Thai Postal Service at the end of the 'eighties worthy to play its part in the service of international communications, for the sake of economic and cultural co-operation with other countries and continents.
