

THE 1820 LAND CONCESSION TO THE PORTUGUESE

by

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It was in Ayudhya that Portugal had its first official contact with the Kingdom of Siam, in 1511. Indeed, soon after the conquest of Malacca "A Famosa", Alfonso de Albuquerque sent Duarte Fernandes with a friendly message to present gifts to King Rama Tibodi II, who was then on bad terms with the Sultan of Malacca because the latter had not paid him the annual tribute of flowers of gold, which he had undertaken to do. The King of Siam extended to the Portuguese envoy a cordial welcome¹ and expressed his contentment in the fact the Portuguese had subdued the rebel Sultan.

A few years later, in 1518, the Kingdoms of Siam and Portugal celebrated their first Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, by which in return for military help promised by the Portuguese, religious and commercial privileges were granted by the Siamese. This treaty, concluded by the envoy Duarte Coelho, was the first that the Siamese ever signed with a European country. Thereafter, numerous Portuguese came to Siam and taught the Siamese the art of warfare, the construction of forts and manufacture of arms, and took part in battles in which the country was constantly involved with its neighbouring kingdoms, especially Burma. During the time of King P'ra Chai who ascended to the throne in 1536, there were 120 Portuguese in his personal guard, an indication of the privileged position held by the Portuguese at the Court of Siam.

In recognition of their help, the Portuguese were granted land where they founded their first settlement—with more than two thousand people—and they built among others, the Churches of St. Paul and St. Dominic. Even today this area is referred to as "Ban Portuguet".² This land, situated along the Chao Phya River, had a length of more than two kilometres and because it was encircled by a canal it was called by some writers the "Island of the Portuguese."

1) Prince Chula Chakrabongse *Lords of Life* (Redman, London) 1967 2nd. ed. p. 36.

2) As I noted on a recent visit.

With the destruction of Ayudhya by the Burmese, in 1767, the Portuguese community existing there vanished and the future King, (General Phya Taksin) who in the following year won the independence of the Kingdom, granted the Portuguese, who had fought with him, land in the area of the new capital which was established in Dhonburi, on the west bank of the Chao Phya River. This agglomeration was called "The Settlement of the Holy Cross." Among its inhabitants there are still some families with Portuguese names, such as Jesus. Two of them make and sell small cakes that tradition says are from an old Portuguese recipe.³

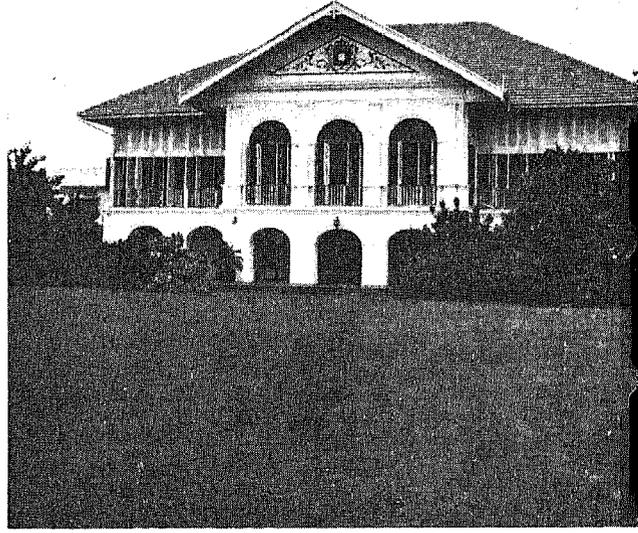
At the time of the transfer of the capital from Dhonburi to the east bank of the Chao Phya River, King Rama I granted the King of Portugal in 1786 another very important and valuable piece of land on the Chao Phya River near the present Portuguese Embassy. This settlement, named "The Rosary", was offered "in consideration of the help given by the Portuguese in wars against the Burmese King."⁴ Frei Francisco das Chagas, sent from Goa to look after the Portuguese, built a church there. They members of this new community built their houses and traded. They also built ships, many of which—such as the "Concordia"—were registered at the Portuguese Consulate in Bangkok.

The Letter of Concession of King Rama I stated: "The King (of Siam) expresses his gratitude to Queen D. Maria I, for her kind generosity, a sign of goodwill that cannot be forgotten until the end of the world The King will not in future cause Your Majesty the inconvenience of sending troops and ammunitions, but requests that orders be given to the Government of Goa to send three thousand muskets during 1787. Should Your Majesty's subjects wish to establish a factory, the King is willing to grant land for this purpose on which a church may be built" This willingness shown by the King of Siam to offer land for the purpose of establishing a Factory, now known as a trading settlement, in Bangkok, was later to be acted upon.

3) A propos, I would like to add that our "fios do ovos" (*foi thong*) is one of the most popular Thai sweets.

4) From the Letter of Concession received in Goa on 28th December 1786,

The holy water stoup found near the ruins of the Church of St. Paul in Ayuthya



The Portuguese Embassy, Bangkok.

The ruins of the Church of St. Paul, Ayuthya





In 1820, during the reign of His Majesty King Rama II, Portugal was given some property where a "Portuguese Factory" and the residence of the first Consul Manuel da Silveira were established. The text of this Letter of Concession is as follows:⁵

"Eu Chao Phya Surivon Montri Ministro de S. Magestade o Rey de Siam faço saber a V. Exa. o Illmo. Exmo. Sr. D. Diogo de Souza, Vice Rey e Capitão General de Mar e Terra dos Estados da India que recebemos as cartas e offertas enviadas por V. Exa. pelo Consul General e eu o fiz introduzir á Audiencia de S. Magestade o Soberano, o mais amado de seus povos, e juntamente o Commandante do Brigue com os seus officiaes e Havendo S. Magestade tomado Conhecimento do conteúdo das cartas de V. Exa. de ordem do seu 2º Rey para que tomado em consideração as prepozições de V. Exa. e as do Ministro de Macau para renovar a antiga amizade deste Reyno com o de Portugal e estabelecer huma Feitoria com a residencia de hum Consul neste Reyno para o que se darão as promptas providencias para se por em execução o se entregou ao Consul General Carlos Manoel da Silveira, hum chão que lhe pareceu proprio e conveniente com 72 braças de Siam ao longo do Rio, 50 de fundo com dois gudes para fazer navios com privilegio que todos os portuguezes poderão vir aqui negociar como antigamete por quanto S. Magestade, Inclinado á Nação Portuguesa que a nenhuma outra. O Consul General, o Commandante do Brigue e seus officiaes receberão quatro meses de comodorias a 160 ticaes por mês e o mesmo Consul General S. Magestade foi servido honrar-lhe com o Titulo de Luong Aphai Phanit e o singio com as insig-

- 5) The letter was no doubt written as a postscript to the Exchange of Notes renewing diplomatic relation between Siam and Portugal on 9th November 1820.

In the Exchange of Notes, published in Bangkok in 1933 with the English title of "Documents from the Royal Colonial Institute London", it is said in the penultimate paragraph, "The 23 Articles above referred to are written in the Siamese and Portuguese languages both exactly of the same tenor, as the Portuguese Linguists of this country are not sufficiently versed in the Portuguese Language the deed has therefore been drawn up in the two Languages to avoid future misconceptions. The Vice Roy will be pleased to receive and retain both the Originals in his possession". P. 33 (English translation in the Burney Papers of the RCI, C.XIX. 3)

The letter we have here was therefore probably also written in both Siamese and Portuguese too.

The original of this letter with the Seal of the Minister's Office is in Lisbon and there is probably a copy in Goa but these have not yet been traced.

nias daquella gradação. As offertas de V. Exa. para S. Magestade forão recebidas todas e entregues aos seus officiaes respectivos. S. Magestade ordenou ao seu Ministro para enviar a S. Exa. pelo Commandante do Brigue Sr. João Baptista cem picos de assucar, 3 ditos de Marfim, 15 ditos de calem; 20 ditos de pimenta, 3 ditos de tinta amarella e es era que V. Exa. accita em consideração á Sua particular estima. As ideias de V. exa. unidas as do Ministro de Macau o Ilmo. Miguel de Arriaga Brun da Silveira afim de instaurar a antiga amisade deste Reyno com o do Portugal o faz dignamente merecedor de ser 1º representante de S. Magestade o Rey de Portugal na India. E se esta amizade for com efeito estabelecida firmemente como deseja S. Magestade e os Portugueses aqui venham comerciar francamente será hum motivo de eternizar para sempre o nome de V. exa. entre todas as Naçoens do mundo inteiro até que exista o Ceo e a Terra. S. Magestade recomenda-me avisar a V. Exa. para que se sirva informar a todos os mercadores que aqui venhão que tragão espingardas bastantes e boas porque S. Magestade muito necessita dellas. Deos Guarde a V. Exa. por muitos annos. Bangkok aos 5 da Lua do 12 mes do annos Marong de 1182 que corresponde à Era Christã 9 de Novembro de 1820.”

An English translation of this might read :

“I Chao Phya Surivon Montri, Minister of his Majesty the King of Siam, make it known to Your Excellency D. Diogo de Souza, Viceroy and Captain General of Sea and Land of the States of India, that we have received the letters and presents sent by Your Excellency with the Consul General and I introduced him to His Majesty the King and also the Captain of the Brig, with his officers, and His Majesty, having taken note of the contents of Your Excellency's letters and taking into consideration the proposals made by you and the Minister of Macau to renew the ancient friendship of this Kingdom, immediate measures will be taken to put them into execution and the possession of a piece of land has been given to the Consul General, Carlos Manoel da Silveira, that seemed to him proper and convenient, with 72 Siamese fathoms along the River, 50 in depth, with two shipyards and with the privilege that all Portuguese could come to trade as before as His Majesty favours the Portuguese Nation more than all others. The Consul General, the Captain of the Brig and his officers will receive for four months for their maintenance 160 ticals per month and His Majesty bestowed upon the Consul General the Title of Luang Aphai Phanit.

The presents of Your Excellency to His Majesty were all received and given to the respective officers. His Majesty ordered his Minister to send you with the Captain of the Brig, Mr. Joao Baptista, 100 piles of sugar, 3 of ivory, 15 of aloes wood, 20 of pepper and yellow dye (saffron ?) and hopes that Your Excellency will accept them in consideration of His particular esteem. Your Excellency's ideas with those of the Minister of Macau, Miguel de Arriaga Brunda da Silveira, to renew the old friendship of this Kingdom with Portugal make him worthy to be the first representative of His Majesty the King of Portugal. And if this friendship is firmly renewed, as His Majesty desires, and the Portuguese come here to trade, it would be a motive to perpetuate for ever the name of Your Excellency among all the Nations in the entire world as long as the Sky and the Land exist. His Majesty recommends me to advise Your Excellency to inform all the merchants who wish to come here to bring with them big quantities of guns because His Majesty is in great need of them. May God keep Your Excellency for many years to come. Bangkok, 5 of the moon of the 12th month of the year Marong of 1182 which corresponds to Christian Era 9th November of the year 1820."

It is on this land that the present Portuguese Embassy stands, and it is the oldest diplomatic residence in Bangkok.

