

## KING MONGKUT'S AUTOGRAPH LETTER TO PIUS IX.

by

H.H. Prince Dhani Nivat

On the 7th of June 1948 I was permitted to visit as well as be specially guided by Miss Speier, one of the officials of the Vatican Museum, through its exhibition halls and library. In the process of that visit, we came across a set of presents and an autograph letter from His Majesty King Mongkut to the Pope. As the keeper of the keys was absent, our visit not having been arranged in advance since we had only a few days to spare in Rome, it was not possible to see every article at closer hand, especially what the long envelope that was presumed to contain the royal letter had in it actually.

It was Commander Emilio Florio, a retired Italian official of the Siamese Ministry of Finance, my guide and companion on this visit, who was at my request able later to arrange for photographs to be taken of the royal autograph letter and the presents. It was he also who very kindly supplied some of the details which I could not get at the time of the visit, thus enabling me to make the following description.

The royal autograph letter (pl. IV-VII) in Siamese was written by a scribe as was, and still is, the custom on a folio (four pages, written on both sides), and was accompanied by an English translation composed by the King. Both were written on good paper, 33 x 20cm in size with a narrow gilded board on all its four sides occupying 12 pages. The envelope was of thick paper, red inside and covered outside with gold leaf. It bears an address in Siamese on the top left-hand corner in the scribe's handwriting the purport of which is identical with the English translation which appears in the middle of the envelope in the King's own hand (pl. IIa), thus :

His Holiness the Pope Pius IX

The Holy Father of the Roman Catholic Christian World

ecc;

ecc;

ecc;

The back of the envelope (pl. IIb) was stamped with one of the Great Seals of the Kingdom, the "Krutapah" (Garuda-bāha). It is an old type of the Garuda seal, figuring the caryatide *bearing Vishnu on its back*.

The presents which accompanied the royal letter (pl. I) have been fully described to me in a letter by Commander Florio, who was kind enough to go again to the Museum after I had left Rome to secure further details regarding the letter. They consisted of (1) a pair of old-style Siamese scissors for haircutting 29cm long with gold insets. (2) a gilt silver bowl 7 cm high with a diametre of 13 cm; with a support also in gilt silver, obviously a *pān*,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  cm high with a diametre of 13 cm; (3) a gilt niello ablution tray, 21 cm in height with a diametre of 33 cm; and (4) a photograph of His Majesty, now placed on the top of the show-case in a revolving frame on one side of which is a coloured portrait of King Mongkut sitting on a chair between two cabinets containing apparently silver pieces of various forms, while on the other side on a bronze plate are engraved the following letters filled in in black:

PIUS IX P.O.M.

A Siamensium Xenia Legatio Oblata

Bibl. Apostolicae Vat.

Munifici Animo

D.D.

MD CCC L XI

The above inscription edited by the Vatican authorities explains itself.

To return to the letter and its translation: The phraseology of the original Siamese conformed to the usual style of the class of royal autographs called *phra rājasāsana*. It bore a crest and three seals. On the top left was a small paper crest, with the *mongkut*, or crown, signifying the King's personal name. The crown was flanked on either side with a five-tiered canopy, the *abhirum*. At top centre of the letter was stamped another of the Great Seals of Kingdom, the *airāpot* (i.e. *airāvat*), the mythological three-headed elephant reckoned as the mount of Indra, the Buddhist Indian Lord of Heaven. The *airāpot* was flanked on either side again by a seven-tiered canopy, the *chatra*, and also a five-tiered *abhirum*. On the back of the elephant was a howdah within which was an *unālom* to signify majesty. The howdah's pinnacle was lit up by rays scintillating from a halo, signifying greatness. This seal is still in use up to the present. A little below, on the left, was another seal, known as the *Exalted Royal Command*, in Siamese Phra Boroma Rāja Onkāra, the name being in fact found within the centre of the seal in ancient Khmer letters. The seemingly blurred reproductions of the above seals on the second page are merely impressions caused in folding up the two pages opposite one another. The only other seal in the letter was stamped on the royal sign manual. It was again a personal seal with the *mongkut* flanked by the *abhirum* in the same manner as the paper crest above.

The royal sign manual, (pl. VII), though blurred by the heavy stamping of the seal can be thus deciphered :

พระราชสาส์นนี้แต่  
สมเด็จพระปรมนทร  
มหามงกุฎ พระจอมเกล้า  
เจ้าแผ่นดินสยาม

The meaning of which being, line by line :

This royal letter from  
Somdech Phra Paramendra  
Maha Mongkut, Phra Chom Klao,  
King of Siam.

This literal translation, it may be noted, is not identical with the wording of the King's translation.

The address of the letter is interesting. The King used as His own title :

*Somdech Phra Paramendr Maha Mongkut, by the Divine blessing of Almighty & Omnipotent Superagency of the Universal beings and various natures thereof who or which was thought considered and presumed in various different names by human beings of various different faiths according to their study education ever received from their ancestor parents &c became,*

*The Supreme King of Siamese Kingdom consisting of Siam proper both southern and northern and adjacent tributary states almost around in every direction Viz: Laos of Shiangs, Lao Kaus, Khahs, Kariangs Cambodia & several provinces of Malay peninsula being a Supreme ruler of this Kingdom reigning in the current Siamese royal dynasty &c.*

It may be noted of course that the rather awkward phraseology of what His Majesty no doubt wanted to adopt as a title corresponding to the Christian phrase "By the grace of God . ." is no longer to be found in more modern documents of this kind, which do not claim the sanction of God's grace for the kingly title. Another important difference is the omission nowadays of the claim over Cambodia, which dependency was still under the sovereignty of the King of Siam in those days.

The King addressed the Pope thus :

*Our venerated pious Holy friend His Holiness the Pope Pius IX the Sanctus Papa & Holy Father heaven keys bear of the Roman Catholic Christian World The highest ruler of Popedom or Papal authority at Rome in Italy &c. &c. &c.*

The actual greeting was :

*Respectfully Sendeth Greeting;  
Venerated Holy Sire.*

The gist of the letter is as follows :

Taking the opportunity of his return to France, his nativeland, of 'John Baptist Pallescok' (Pallegoix of course), Bishop of Mallos, whom His Majesty had known since the days before His accession to the Throne, the King, reflecting that the traditional attitude of the Siamese Monarchy had long been based on a spirit of tolerance which gave protection to all who dwelled in His Kingdom irrespective of the denomination they professed in religion, wished to renew the good understanding and happy relationship inaugurated some two centuries previously by King Narai with the Holy See. He had sent letters and presents to the Pope with the Bishop on a previous visit. The Bishop had returned bearing a letter from the Holy Father, dated the 20th December 1852, reciprocating the King's good wishes with a present in the form of an elaborate screen of fine workmanship.

The King now entrusts this letter and certain presents to a diplomatic mission consisting of nobles who are related to the Queen, His Majesty's Grandmother. The mission is to be conveyed to Europe by the gracious assistance of the French sovereign to whom it is to be also accredited. The letter is, the King continues, to express to the Holy Father the deep respect and high consideration which the King has always entertained for him and to acquaint him of the fact that the Pope's anxiety for a liberal and benevolent attitude on the part of His Majesty towards Christians living in Siam has been complied with in every respect. Presents in the

nature of articles for the purification of the body are sent, as already enumerated. A photograph of His Majesty is also attached to the set of presents. The mission is travelling under the care of the French navy and the King hopes that it would arrive safely.

The letter ends with the King's sincere assurance of the high consideration He entertains for the Holy Father and the prayer, a characteristic compromise of the time, to the "Superagency of the Universe whose nature is always difficult to be exactly known by every one of living beings or sounds as the foresaid" to "pour His Divine blessing on Your Holiness' body and mind..." in order to ensure the Pope's happiness—temporal as well as spiritual.

The royal autograph has been reproduced on the following plates and its translation transcribed in ordinary type with a specimen page (pl. III) to show the reader how the translation looked.

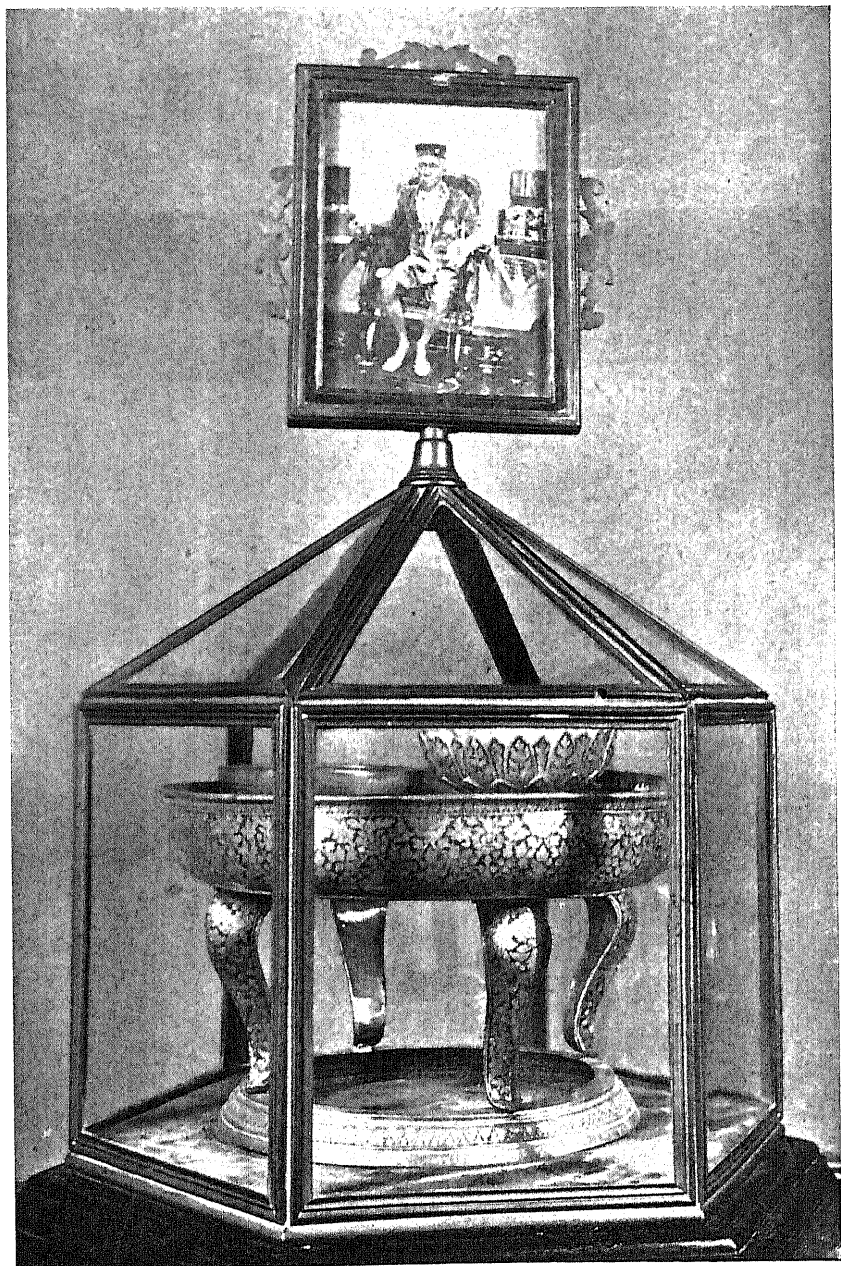


Plate I

Angli: Holiness The gores  
Dis nine the The Holy Father  
of Roman Catholic Christian World  
see see  
Rome



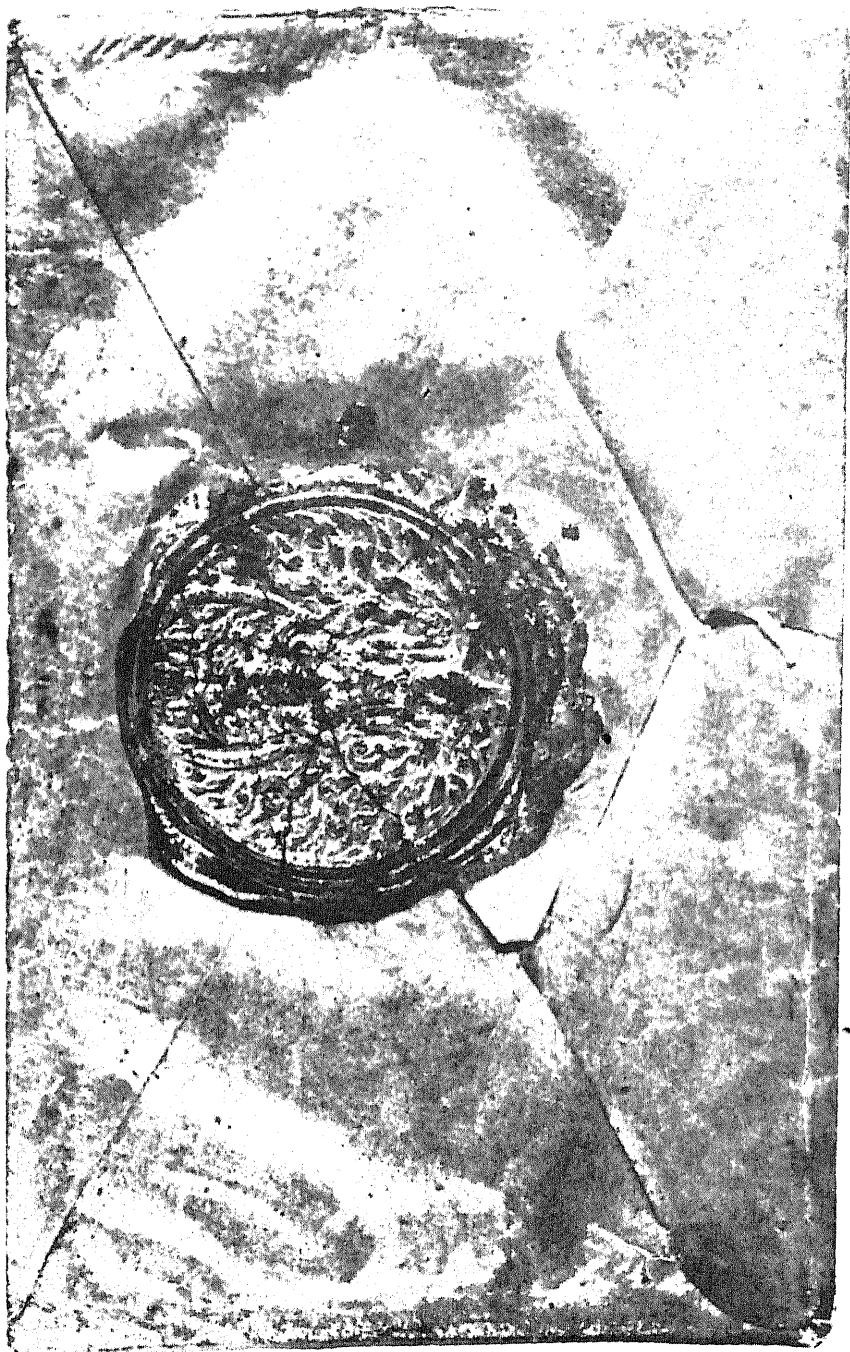


Plate II b





The true translation in English from  
Siamese Royal letter written in Siamese  
character on preceding pages.



Somdech Phra Surasundhri. Maha  
Bongkhit, By the Divine blessing of  
Almighty & Omnipotent Supremacy  
of the Universal being & various natures  
thereof upon which was thought considered &  
presumed in various different natures called  
in various names by human beings of various  
different faiths according to their Study & Edu-  
cation even received from their ancestor  
parents & became.

The Supreme King of  
Siamese Kingdom consisting of Siam proper  
both Southern & Northern and adjacent tri-  
bute States almost around in every direc-  
tion Viz: Siam of Siam, Siam of Siam, Siam  
of Siam Cambodia & several provinces of  
Malay peninsula being a Supreme ruler  
of this Kingdom reigning in the current  
Siamese Royal dynasty 1<sup>st</sup>.

To



พระบาทสมเด็จพระ

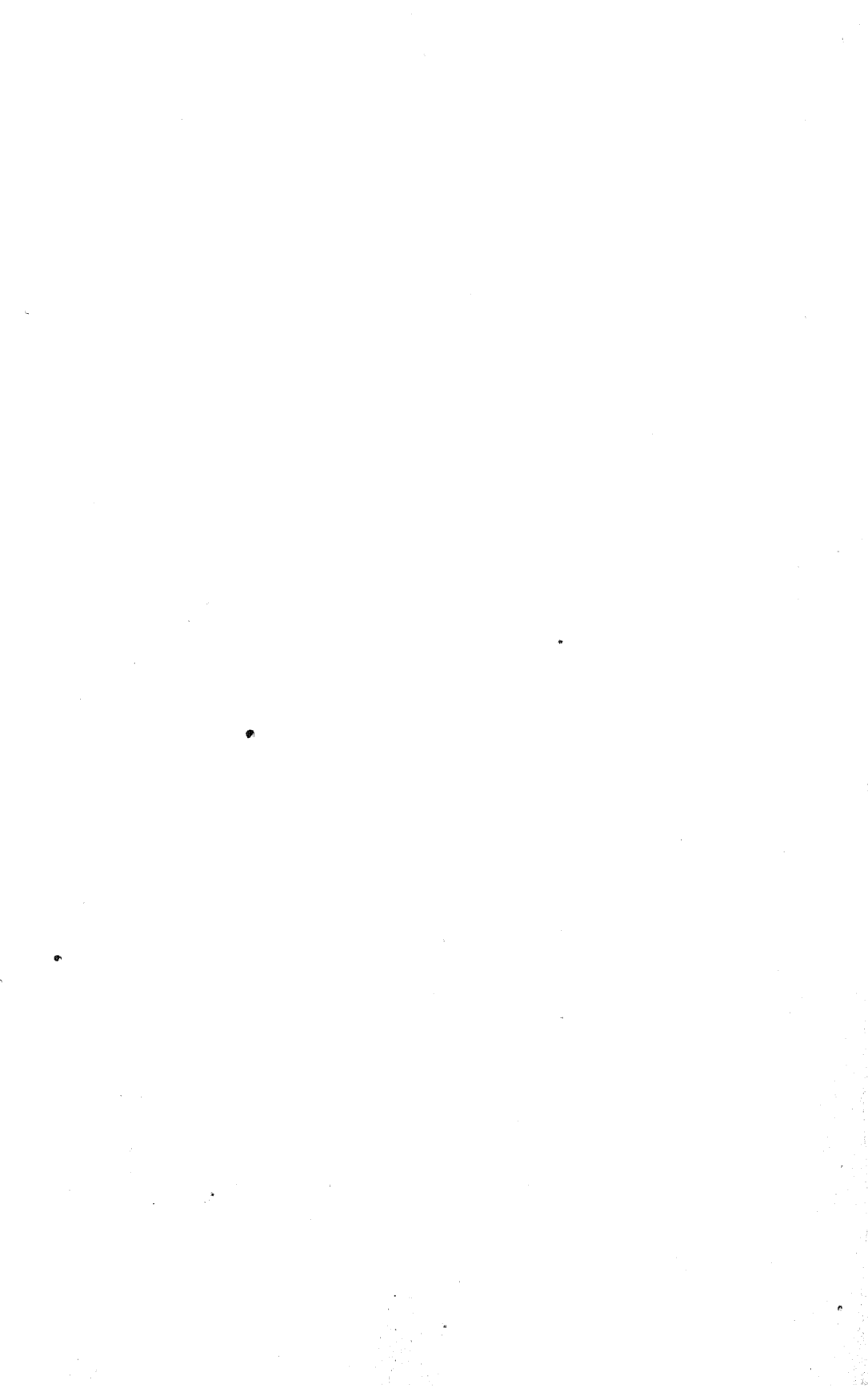
ในรัชกาลพระบรมมหาราชวัง ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้เป็นใหญ่ในแผ่นดิน ซึ่งด้วย  
อำนาจทิพยเนตรทิฐิญาณการทรงเห็นเหตุใหญ่ ซึ่งเป็นปรารถนาเกิดขึ้นในโลกโดยเหตุ  
ในโลกที่ยังลึกลับยาก ๆ ย่อมลึกลับยากที่ที่ใดโดยความเลวของการ ๆ ตามที่ให้อิสระโดย  
เสรีกันนั้น อาจจะประคับประคองกันมาได้ก็เป็นเหตุเป็นใหญ่มีอำนาจในแผ่นดิน  
ซึ่งการใหญ่กว่าสิ่งอื่นทั้งโลกให้ลึกลับเห็น แต่สิ่งอื่น ๆ ที่ใดสิ่ง ซึ่งหาวิธีความเท่า  
เท่าเทียมแต่สิ่งที่ไม่ใช่ แต่สิ่งนั้นหลายหลายเรื่องแล้ว ๆ การปกครองแผ่นดินโดยพระ  
เบญจเนตรทิฐิญาณนั้น ๔ ในพระบรมราชชนนี ขอเจริญทางพระชนมายุที่นานยิ่ง  
ทุกขนิมิตการงานนั้น มงคลคุณมาซึ่งการที่น่ายินดี ๑ คือการที่ลึกลับหรือการ  
จริงโดย พิธีศักดิ์สิทธิ์มีการลึกลับที่ประหลาด ๆ ที่มีการอธิบายเป็นครั้งในกรรม  
แผ่นดินลึกลับให้ลึกลับ ทำเพราะเหตุเป็นภพของมนุษย์กับมนุษย์ที่แก่ประหลาดแผ่นดินนั้น  
ก็รู้ที่รู้แก่ลึกลับด้วยกับยากหลวงบางบางก็รู้ จึงได้ให้แก่เขาแก่พระชนมายุ  
การที่รู้ ๑๑ ให้เป็นนิมิตด้วยสิ่งมงคล ทำเป็นของบอกลอ อยู่ในกรรม  
มหากษัตริย์ เป็นประเพณีของเทศาภิบาลแล้วแต่ทำมาซึ่งการลึกลับที่ประหลาด  
ในแผ่นดินลึกลับนั้นนานวัน ครั้นเมื่อภพของมนุษย์กับมนุษย์ที่แก่ประหลาดแผ่นดินแล้ว  
ก็ย่อมให้ยากหลวงบางบางก็รู้ด้วยกับสิ่งมงคลนั้นเป็นประเพณีของ ๑ รู้จักจาก

Plate V

แต่ก่อนเขาได้แผ่นดินแล้วเสด็จขึ้นเหนือ ดงนั้นก็ ก็องแดงเป็นระย คบสักสี่กษณจะขึ้น  
 ธรณีนึงแล้ว ภายหลังได้เข้าหลวงของเขาก็คบกับเมียอีกเป็นระย เขาจะบ่นด่า  
 ได้ขึ้นสนมที่ใกล้วังท่านผู้บิดาด้วย เป็นอันรู้เหตุเพื่อสนมกับบุตรก่อนเมียด้วย  
 สมเด็จพระสังฆราชจึงดบขึ้น ให้นางสาวตักขิณิกาน้อยเป็นภรรยาจะกระทำกับนาง  
 เมื่อนั้น ได้ทบทบความแล้วก็มีเกาะอินทียิ่งนัก

[illegible][illegible]







The true Translation into English from the Siamese Royal letter written in Siamese Character on the proceeding pages.

Somdetch Phra Paramendr Maha Mongkut, By the Divine blessing of Almighty & Omnipotent Superagency of the Universal beings & various natures thereof who or which was thought considered and presumed in various different natures & called in various names by human beings of various different faiths according to their study Education ever received from their ancestor parents &c became,

The Supreme King of Siamese Kingdom consisting of Siam proper both Southern & Northern and adjacent tributary states almost around in every direction Viz: Laos of Shiangs, Lao Kaus, Khahs Kariangs Cambodia and several provinces of Malay peninsula being a supreme ruler of this Kingdom reigning in the current Siamese royal dynasty &c. To Our Venerated pious Holy friend His Holiness the Pope Pius IX the Sanctus Papa & Holy Father heaven Keys bear of the Roman Catholic Christian World The highest ruler of Popedom or Papal authority at Rome in Italy. &c. &c. &c.

*Respectfully Sendeth Greeting ;*

Venerated Holy Sire;

Where as Right Reverend John Baptist Pallexox before his being selected by Roman Catholic Christian religious community here & becoming appointed or elevated in office & dignity of the Bishop of Mallos Vicar Apostolic for Siam from His late Holiness the Pope Gregory XVI has been our intimate friend very familiar with us for he has been a resident of nearest place of our former residence when he became entrined & enter to reside in this royal place we have permitted to our beloved friend Right Reverend John Baptist Balleox the Bishop of Mallos Vicar Apostolic in Siam to approach and entertain with us frequently and continually. On the second year of our reign Right Reverend J.B.P. the Bishop of Mallos

has approached us and took leave as to depart from hence for Visit of his native land of France and also saying that he will visit Rome to have his honor of kissing your Holiness feet if an opportunity might allow him. On hearing here of we considered that almost everyone of the rulers of this Kingdom of Siam from remote past whole were and are very righteous a King of best international Laws that they were & are not an opposing enemies to various religious systems which should considered by them as the only Superstition of the people of this country of various different faith who are according to their religious custom continued from their ancestors and parents & became converted by being nearest for marriage &c.

Although those religious rites are opposing to the established religion of this country namely Buddhism in Singhalise Section: which believed maintained and Supported by everyone of the sovereigns of Siam so long as more 1000 years ago. They yet allowed whole people of various different faiths excerside in various religious rite freely without any molestation either from Governments or other party of different faith who are near of the other & other faith so the Teachers and priests of all religions introduced & continued here have freedom in teaching & maintaining according to their religious Knowledges and System in pectuliar mention to the Christianity the Sianese Governments are not alway enemy to the Christian religion either of Roman Catholic or protestend faith like the Chinese and Cochinchinese Governments who are the rulers of nearest countries so the certain parties of Christian Chinese and Cochinchinese have liberty to take refuge here when their Governments have molested to them for their religious excersision in their native land such the laws of our country We considered a best law which makes whole people of kingdom have spiritual happiness in exersision of the path of their eternal lives according to their believe and pleasure as the way of happy eternal lives is in fact difficult to be exactly known ascertained as well as that of the internal future welfairs happiness &c.

So the authorities of the Countries ought to permit everyone of their subjects and foreign visitors & resident to seek their way for eternal happiness according to their believe where as we have learnt from the annual of our Country that upon the reign of His late Majesty Somdetch Phra Narayan Maharaj one of the Ayudian King of Siam who was our 10th predecessor & whose reign was happend about 200 years ago. His late Holiness the Pope At Rome who was a Holy Father of the Roman Catholic Christian world upon the Same time did send an holy letter to His Siamese Majesty the said King recommending his favourable protection and indulgance on all Roman Catholic Christians in Siam His late Siamese Majesty has received the Holy letter & accept to accord the favour an all Christian people here. It has proved great honor the said King of Siam once we have therefore asked Right Reverend John Baptist Pallegox the Bishop of Mallos that can be introduced our name and Characters to your Holiness to let you know of us as well as His late Majesty Somdech Phra Narayan Maharaj has been acquainted with the Pope corresponding to his Reign if he (the Bishop of Mallos) would have an honor to visit Rome for kissing of your Holiness feet & the Bishop has accepted that he can and will with much pleasure & said moreover that if We would write our letter in address to your Holiness he will convey it to place at your Holiness feet with much pleasure, but upon that moment however he was in very hurriance to depart from hence on that day for being in narrow time of the sailing of a vessel in which he ought to take his passage immediately in hand to him in charge if we would please to write to you Holiness for this consequence we have availed ourselves to write our autographic letter in English language on which our knowledge and ability allow us to do althrough the pure Latin language was suitable or proper to be written in Address to your Holiness and after our own handwriting we have sealed with our official royal seal and our own standard and enclosed in an Envelope & handed to him in his departure from our presence and after a single year & little more. Right Reverend J.B. Pallegox has forwarded an Holy letter of your Holiness dated Saint Peter Rome 20th December Anno Christi 1852 to us from Paris whose he has been upon that

time and afterward when he was returned here he has handed us the Duplicate of your Holiness Holy letter of the same content and date seal with holy seal but the original & Duplicate were written in pure Latin language accompanied with English translation which we perused throughout and left much joy for the Gracious content of which Holy letter we beg to offer our great sincere thanks on first place.

Also Right Reverend J.B. Pallegox the Bishop has presented us a beautiful framed Mosico work ripresenting a building called Pantheon in your Holiness name stating that it was designed for our acceptance and entrusted to His care by your Holiness though it was not mentioned in your Holiness Holy letter to us We having placed a confedence Right Reverend Bishop have received it respectfully with much pleasure observing that it was best manufacture of the Mosaic worker who worked with great industry We have exhibited the said Mosaic work to our royalty & nobility at our Court house they were unanimously praised that it was best thing made with great humap industry so it is remained fixed in wall of our Court house for amusement of our strangers & visitors who please to see various curiosity until the present days it proved great honor to us as it was known by almost everyone here that was presented us from your Holiness who is the Highest Holy Sanctified Father of the Roman Catholic Christian world We beg therefore to express our very great many sincere thanks to your Holiness for the foresaid present in Second place.

On this occasion we have embraced best opportunity to send our Noble Embassy to Europe the principal member of which Embassy are our relative personages who were kindred and descendants from the noble family of our Paternal Grand Mother who Royal Queen Consort of His late Majesty's our Paternal Grand Father the First Sovereign of Siam in present dynasty and Queen Mother of our own esteemed royal Father the Second Sovereign of this dynasty because His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of France having connected in true Friendship with us & have placed good arrangement to each other to send & receive Siamese Embassy to the

Imperial Court of France to pay our respects to His Imperial Majesty being the first purpose has sent just now his steamer of War to receive the Siamese Embassy according to His promise in the arrangements placed with us when this opportunity was opened to us by the French Government We have recalled to our mind the true Friendship ever existed between your Holiness and ourselves before, as the foresaid correspondence and became desirous of the said Embassy to pay personal respect to your Holiness in Our royal name. We have therefore arranged this royal letter officially in proper Siamese Character with true translation thereof in English Style in which we possessed an ability and facility sufficient for purposed intention of ourselves in address to your Holiness directly to assure your Holiness that we have alway Sincere regard and Amity toward your Holiness continually and are enquiring from Roman Catholic missionaries here for intelligence of Your Holiness spiritual and temporial happiness & very often & to state that what advice and instruction has been given us from your Holyness through medium of a clause of your Holy letter showing that whosoever are distinguished for religious faith for purity and innocense of life We should not suffer them to be vaxations by treated and We should have Cherished and protection toward our people and foreign Visitors and resident here who are religious under your Holiness Popedom or Papal authority &c. Such the advice and iustruction received by us from your Holiness was satisfactory to us maintained by us alway.

On this opportunity we have much pleasure in Selecting and collecting for your Holiness acceptance something being the articles to be employed in purifying body to be an Embem of purification suitable for Holy name of your Holiness those are as following number.

1. A scissor for shortening hairs in Siamese and Cambodian fasion inlaid with gold in diversity a sile.

2. A gilt silver vessel for pure water its suitable holder or stand made of gilt silver.

3. A gilt silver legged plate for receipt purifying water other was diversified with black metalic painting according the engraving work & richly gilt as well as the fore alluded in No. 2.

4. A Royal Portrait of ourselves made in photographic camera recently for being a card from us to pay our respect to your Holiness hoping your Holiness will see it as having seen us in person.

These all articles were made by Siamese manufacturers according our trifling ability We beg to design for your Holiness kind acceptain and have entrusted to the care of our Embassy in accompany herewith.

I have little doubt however that wether will our Embassy have good opportunity to personal honor at presence of your Holiness or not, We have wished so as the foresaid. The effect of our desire so should be according to determination & decision of French authority under whom our Embassy ought to depend from their departure from here until their return here for they have opportunity to visit Europe from esteemed favour kind & accomodation of the French Governments merely We trust that our royal letters & accompanied royal presents designed for acceptance of your Holiness will no doubt be reached Rome in any rate as We know that the principal members of French authority generally of Roman Catholic faith & very delighted with great veneration in your Holiness, they may perhaps be glad to favour us by conveying our royal letter & presents to your Holiness in safety.

We venture to state the true occurance our mind to your Holiness that when you have Righteously highest dignity in the papal seat from unanimous reverence of principal Cardials of Roman Catholic churches & several sovereigns of various nations of Roman Catholic Faith. So your Holiness have papal authority upon whole roman Catholic Christian World, you have now great extensive amity grace & mercy toward whole mankind throughout the human world whosoever are they Christians of other religious faith like your Holiness has kindness toward us for instance; We consider your Holiness Characters of a philanthropist as a greatest

& highest Character of a distinguished being as your Holiness is now.

We pray to the Superagency of the Universe whose nature is always difficult to be exactly known by everyone of living beings or sounds as the foresaid, that he may pour his Divine blessing on your Holiness' body & mind so that may your Holiness have both temporal and spiritual happiness and safety throughout from this your internal life to eternal world for ever and ever

Amen

Given at our royal audience hall "Anant Samagome" in Grand Palace of Ratna Kosindr Mahindr Ayudia in state of Bangkok Siam on the Thursday tenth night of the Waxing Moon in the Lunar month of Chitr being the fifth month reckoning from commencement of Cold Season in the year of Cock still decade of Siamese Astronomical Era One thousand two hundred and twenty two. Corresponding to the Solar date of twenty first day of the month of March in the Christian Era One thousand eight hundred and Sixtyone which year is the eleventh or day is 3599th day of our reign.

This from your Holiness

..... Good Friend

S.P.P.M. Mongkut Major Rep.

Siamensium.