

Some Remarks on Kaempfer's Description of Siam, 1690.



“People living in glass houses should not throw stones” is a very old saying. Few of us can boast of a handwriting which is such that a person not knowing the language in which we write, will be able to read and pronounce it correctly, even if he knows the value of the written signs. We should be well able to pronounce correctly any text in a language unknown to us, if printed or written clearly in characters the value of which is known to us, although we do not know the meaning of the words. If we communicate our thoughts in writing to others we communicate them in sentences, and not in single words, and consequently, even if our writing is not very distinct, the person receiving it, will be able to gather our meaning from the context, although we do not cross our ‘t,’ or put the dot on the ‘i’ in the wrong place. This of course is commonplace. These slight omissions are, however, a fruitful source of Hobson-Jobsonism, if we want to give the pronunciation of a word in a foreign language. Few of the ancient or modern travellers cared to learn the language of the countries which they visited and described; when they heard a word or the name of a place pronounced which was of sufficient interest to them, they noted down what they believed they had heard. The diary or the notes were not very carefully written, and in transcribing their text, our travellers drew on their imagination, and we get names of places the explanation of which must tax our ingenuity. We find for instance in ancient maps of Siam the point of Cin. It is also called Kni, and it is not difficult to see that the name should have been spelt Kui. The ‘i’ was pointed in the wrong place, ‘u’ mistaken for ‘n,’ and hence the confusion. Bowring gives the name of the third month in Siamese as ‘sain’; what he mean was ‘sam’; it is a case of careless handwriting and bad punctuation, just as Morgen for

Mergui. Another fruitful source of misunderstanding is, when the traveller is told the meaning of a word and in editing his note-book believes he has a genuine word in a foreign language. We have thus a Paklat belo (*i. e.* below) where below is the translation of lang (lower), in contradistinction to Paklat bon, the Upper Paklat.

Now one of the best observers of foreign countries is the well known Engelbert Kaempfer, the Physician to the Dutch Embassy to the Emperor of Japan's Court, whose history of Japan together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690-1692, still hold its own. Before starting on his voyage to Japan he visited Siam with the Dutch Embassy, and we owe to him an exceedingly interesting and on the whole exact description of Siam, as it was in the first year of the reign of Phra Phetraxa. The information he records was given to him by the members of the Dutch factory, who, we may suppose, were at that time *persona grata* at Court. Now Kaempfer gives us in his report of Siam names of places which he passed and the names of persons with whom he became acquainted. Most of them look like Siamese words somewhat gone astray, and it requires in most cases but little reflection to correct them, as we would correct printers' errors. In the reprint of Kaempfer's work issued by MacLehose, that has not been done, and it may not be considered an ungrateful task and a tribute to his memory, if we fulfil this posthumous office. Most of the mistakes are due to a careless handwriting, aggravated by the fact that the work was issued and translated after his death from his German manuscript. He had an untrained ear, which did not distinguish between mutes and aspirates, and to which many vowels sounded alike. Kaempfer of course did not know Siamese, and the Dutch who gave him information gave it to him in bazaar Siamese.

Now the first man who supplied the Dutch on their voyage with information was one called Monproncena, a merchant of Siam. His real title is Mūn Phrom Sena, and he was one of the King's factors. The Pāli title is Brahmasena. He gave the name of the largest of the rocks and small islands as Samajotn *i. e.*, สามร้อยยอด, Sam Roi Yot, the three hundred mountains. The several rocks and islands which we

saw on our Larboard, he called Pran or Prani, *i. e.*, ปราณ^๕ Pran. Next, he said, followed Czam or Ceam, which is Cham as marked on Bowring's map, from which a direct road led to Mergui; then further, going up, Putprie, *i. e.*, the popular pronunciation of Pexaburi, *i. e.*, Phritphri; then Isan, *i. e.*, Yisan, ยี่สาม^๕; then Maya Klon, which is of course เมฆคอง, Me Khlong; then Satzyin, *i. e.*, Tha Chin (ท่าจีน^๕); then the mouth of the river Meinam, แม่น้ำ (*i. e.* the river) which in the language of Siam is called Pagnam Taupia, Paknam Chao Phraya.

Kaempfer arrived at the Dutch factory called Amsterdam, near the present Paklat. He then went to Bangkok, and afterwards arrived at Judia, *i. e.*, Ayuddhya. He had an audience with the Berklan Chancellor of Siam, who has also the direction of Foreign affairs, *i. e.* the Phra Khlang (พระคลัง^๕), the keeper of the Treasury, and as such Minister for Foreign Affairs. It would appear from this statement, that as reward for the services rendered to the King in the troubles after the death of Phra Narai the Minister was raised to this position which is generally divided between the chiefs of the Civil and Military Administration. We know from other sources that Nai Pān was the Ambassador of King Narai to France under the title of Phya Visutr and assisted Phra Phetraxa in his negotiations with the French garrison under La Farge.—

“The day of the audience there came over to our factory four Operas or Mandarins of the second rank.” The title is พระ, Phra, and อธิบดี, ok, is the epitheton ornans corresponding to the present ฤๅ for Guna, honour.

The names of these Mandarins (to employ this word which corresponds to Skr. Mantrin, Councillor, adviser) were Opera Tsijat (พระศรียศ^๕), Sriyot, an officer of the Treasury. With him came the official described as the Siabander, *i. e.*, the Malay title of the Harbour Master. “Before sate the Mandarins as Oja Tewejaata, a Mahomedan set over the Quarry of the King's elephants.” This is

the title of the official in charge of the King's elephants viz., พระเทพราชาธิบดี.

Bad handwriting and indistinct hearing converted the title to its present form. It is the title which the King himself held in the reign of his predecessor, Phra Narai.

Oja Pipat is of course พระยาพพัฒน์ โภชญา. He is described as the Deputy Berkham. We say to-day Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Kaempfer states in another place that he was formerly "a domestic of Faulcon, of whom he learnt the skill of pinching strangers."

In the second chapter Kaempfer deals with the state of the Government of Siam. The Tsiau Fa, *i. e.*, เจ้าฟ้า, or Sovereign, is the supreme (heavenly) prince. The King is otherwise called สมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว and it is only in the reign of King Mongkut that, on the analogy of ไบบาน, nai ban, as chief of the household, the word ในหลวง. Nai Hluang, as chief of the State, was formed. The name of the King, Phetraatia, is a very near approach to เพชรราช, Phetraxa. He succeeded to the throne on the death of Pro Narees Naraye pintsiau, *i. e.*, พระนเรศวร พระนารายณ์เป็นเจ้า

Kaempfer gives then the history of the conspirator as he calls Faulcon. The story is such as was current amongst the Dutch who had necessarily viewed the advent of the French with some misgivings. Monpi Tatso, described as the King's son-in-law and by him adopted, is หม่อมมัยยัก *alias* อภัยทศ (Pijathot, Aphaithot). It must be mentioned that Kaempfer in recording the dates makes a mistake of one year inasmuch as the events took place in 1688, as witness the report of the French writers, and not as he states in 1689. One of the names of places he mentions in this case is Livo, which is, of course, Louvo, the present Lophburi, and the temple Wathniakprani Waan is วัดหินาพระนิพพาน, the temple dedicated to the memory of the Nirvāna of the Buddha.

Kaempfer in recording the death of Phra Narai's brothers recalls the violent death of the King's uncle in October, 1656. He calls him Pracitama Ratia, which is พระศรีสุธรรมราชา, Phra Srisudhar-marāja.

"In this manner Petraatia got possession of the administration, with the title of the King of Siam Tanassari Sucketa and Poiseluke as also protector of Cambodia Jehoor Patany and Queda."

The title is clear, viz, Tenasserim, which up to 1767 formed part of the Kingdom of Siam, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok, Johor, Patani, and Keda.

"By virtue of the ancient Laws of Siam upon the demise of the King, the crown devolves on his brother, and upon the brother's death, if there be none, on the eldest son."

Now the succession to the throne is regulated by the Law of 1360, according to which the eldest son of the Queen shall have precedence over all other Members of the Royal family. It is foreign to the purpose of the paper to show under what circumstances the law was apparently violated. It will be found that it was the case when the heir apparent was of tender years and it was necessary to put a stronger man at the head of affairs. It was then that the King's brother became Heir presumptive. The office held was designated by the name of Wang Na, the Palace of the vanguard, wrongly translated Second King.

In Kaempfer's time this position was held by Peja Surasak, also called Peja Wania and Fai Wani, *i. e.*, the Phra Mahauparaj Sarasakdi, the Wang Na, Fai Na. He is frequently mentioned in the Phongsavadan as Nai Madua. He is said to have been the son of King Narai by a Laosian. His mother was given in marriage to Phra Phetraxa, by whom he was adopted. It is known that the quarrels he had with Faulcon led finally to the overthrow of Faulcon. He was heir apparent and succeeded to the throne on the death of Phra Phetraxa, and Kaempfer rightly states that he had charge of all crown affairs. We have already mentioned the Peja Phraklan, Peja Wan is the พระยาราชมนตรี (the Minister of the Household) and his title "Thao Peja Taramasa" is Chao Phraya Dharma. He is one of the four supports of the States the Chatustambha, just

as the Peja Jummaraj. He is described as Chinese and as being Chief Justice. The title is พระยาหมวราช and he is in charge of the Capital both for civil and criminal affairs, and has been so up to the reform of the Law Courts in 1893.

Peja Poletheb, whom Van Vliet calls Oya Poeletip, is พระยาพดเทพ and his position among the four supports of the State is that of Receiver General, and he held the administration of the Crown Lands and their revenue. The present office is of course that of Ministry for Agriculture and Trade.

The Peja Tsakri is พระยาจักรี, who in former reigns divided with Peja Kalahom, พระยากลาโหม, the administration of the provinces, the Chakri being in charge of the Civil, and the Kalahom of the Military administration. These formed together the Great Council of State.

We have already referred to some of the minor officials, as Kaempfer calls them. Oja Tamam, Captain of the guards, is ออักษาทายนา, his proper title is Captain of *the sea forces*, and Oja De Tsiu is พระยาเดโช, Captain of the land forces (General).

The other remarks Kaempfer makes of the official hierarchy are correct: there are no hereditary family names, great men are called after their employment. And he is also right in the order of the dignities, Peja and Oja, Opera, Oluang, Okucen, *i. e.*, ออักษุน, and Omucen, *i. e.*, ออักษมน. Peja and Oja are described as princes. That must be taken with a certain restriction. They are the highest titles in the official hierarchy, and as such rank after the Prince. In Kaempfer's time a new dynasty had just come to the throne and no princes of the blood were recognised.

Kaempfer says that the Kingdom of Siam, is by the nations called Muan Thai *i. e.* เมืองไทย. "In their books it is sounded with this epithet, Krom Thep Pramma haa Ikoon (Circuitus visitationis Deorum), the Circuit of the visitations of the Gods." This is a pretty free translation for Krung Deb Mahanagara, which simply means the excellent capital or the great city, or with its full title "Dvaravadi," the city with many gates. King Mongkut in an

article reproduced in the Bangkok Calendar for 1871 says: "The city is now called Krung Deb Mahanagara only from the custom of so calling the northern capitals. Any city becoming the capital of the Kingdom was thus named. So it was in regard to the Capital of Chao U Thong, which is now denominated Khi Pom, it was anciently Krung Deb Mahanagara, which being translated into Siamese, would be the great city or the Royal city where the Lord of the great city resides. But if the word Krung be translated strictly according to the original it means river. Hence whoever was Lord of the river from its mouth to its source, that man was called Chao Krung, Lord of the river, and the city which he made his residence was denominated Krung."

We can pass over his remarks about the name of the country as Tziam. Much has been written about it, and reference can be made to the Chinese name of Siam as Siemlo.

In the description of Laos it requires not much acumen to see that Landjam and Tsamaja are Lanxang and Chiengmai. The description of Laos is accurate and it has already been pointed out that both Lao and Siamese belong to the Thai race, whose manners, customs and language are practically identical and that consequently to make a distinction between them is to make a distinction without a difference.

In the Introduction, the editor of Kaempfer's work has already pointed out that the author repeats himself now and then. So after a description of Laos he returns to Ayuddhya and once more gives some details. He speaks about temples and palaces, and it is not difficult to identify the names by which the Buddha was known, Prah, Prah Pudi Djiau, Sammana Khodom as พระ, พระพุทธเจ้า, สมณโคตม.

He mentioned in this connection the temple called in the Peguan Language "Tsiannpum Tsiun,"—what Kaempfer wanted to record in his pronunciation was Tsiann Panum Tsuin, viz:—Chao Phanam Xöng, an ancient temple of which mention is already made in A. D. 1269.

We can easily identify also Prahkdi, Pratsiebi as พระเจดีย์, Phra Pran as พระปรางค์, and in Pkka thon and Puka

thon, we have ^๒พื๒๒๒๒๒๒, Phu Khao thong.

We need not enter into details about the religion of the Buddhism in Siam. What has been said regarding it by ancient writers, only shows that a certain interest was taken in the religion, but it can teach us nothing, as the writers did not go back to the original source, but were satisfied to record what they saw and heard from persons scarcely competent to deal with the subject. He speaks of the ecclesiastics and calls the Samanera, Dsiaunces or Friars. This is of course bad handwriting for he wanted to write Dsiau nen ^๒พื๒๒๒๒. The priests he calls "Dsiau ku," *i. e.*, ^๒พื๒๒๒, my master. This is still affected in remote places as a form of address to the priest. He also repeats the statement that the priests are called by the Peguan word Talapoi. No proof exists that the word is Peguan, although we find the word used as designation for the priests in ancient writings. The places to which the doctrine has spread are of course Pegu, Siam, Cambodia, Arracan, Burma, Laos, Tonkin and Cochin China. The ecclesiastical hierarchy is correctly described, and the island to which the ecclesiastics were banished in case of crime, which Kaempfer calls Coccatsian, is Ko Kathiu (เกาะกัทเทีย). It is known that priests and persons of Brahmanic origin, according to old law, occupied a privileged position, and no death penalty could be carried out on them. They were banished (Kotmai Monthierabal vol. 11.123. Cpr with Manu V. iii, 380).

Kaempfer speaks then of the chronology. He gives the names of the year, and in doing so we can again trace the consequence of a bad handwriting and of a bad pronunciation. Piji is of course Pi, ^๒พื, the vowels are to be pronounced in the Dutch fashion, *i. e.*, oe-u. ae-ā, and we then find no difficulty in recognizing the cycle of the twelve animals. He is also right in explaining the names of the month as first, second, etc, but he shares with others the mistake in stating that every third year the Siamese have an intercalary month. It is known that the intercalary month occurs seven times in nineteen years. He is wrong in believing that he is translating the days of the week as he does. He is simply recording

the meaning attached to them according to astrological notions current in his days, and it may be mentioned in this respect that according to these astrological notions, Sunday is the day of the King, Monday of the Queen, Tuesday of the two chief Ministers, Wednesday of the people, Thursday of the learned, Friday of the Treasurer, Saturday of the city, *i. e.*, they are considered propitious days for commencing any work. In Wan Alit we should read Wan Athit, a question of crossing the "t".

In enumerating the festivals he speaks of the Kitimbae and Kitinam, which are of course Kathin¹bok and Kathin nam festivals, at which the King bestowed garments on the priests. We learn from him that at Kathin bok the King proceeded to the temple Naphetat. In a Singhalese description the temple is called Napatan where the final "t" was misread for "n." It is of course the Wat Na Phra Dhātu, the temple where some of the relics of the Buddha are kept. Kaempfer mentions besides the festival of the Kaupasa, and oppasa; they are the Kao vasa and ok vasa, the entering and leaving the priesthood for a season during the Buddhist lent. He also mentions the festival Sahut sioian, which he describes as the festival of washing the elephant.

This festival is called กิเฬนทวิจฉนฬ. Indistinct writing coupled with faulty audition produced this form. The celebration of the festival has been given up in this reign.

He devotes his last remarks to the coinage of Siam. He seems to have been fond of closing his words with flourishing lines. For only so can we account for Tsiani, *i. e.*, Xang, Tamluni for Tamlung. He also names the Tikal called Baat ๒๓, and gives the name of Salüng as slini. He calls it Maas, and this seems to be a Dutch word. It is no longer used, but it is of frequent occurrence in descriptions of Siam of the 17th Century. He goes somewhat astray in the spelling of the subsidiary coinage; still we can recognise in Siampai, songpai, and Pynini is clearly phainüng.

It contains an uncertain number of the Bija ๒๒²⁵ "by us called cowers" (cowries). He concludes with the statement that 500-800 cowries are equal to a Füang, which he tells us the Siamese pronounce Phuanì or Pujang, and that all the silver money of Siam is coined of Dutch crowns, which are for this purpose coined in Holland and imported by

the Dutch East India Company at seven shillings the crown. We have of course not been able to identify all words given by our author, and in correcting his proof-sheets we should have in some instances been compelled to send them back with a query. As conscientious proof readers we might have given our reading and thus explained Tsian Krue as Chao Khun and even Tsiant Tsiam, as Thai Thao, for these were, as they are now, the forms of address without any epitheton ornans.



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