

25: The King of Lanchang presents Nang Soi Thong to King Phanwasa¹

[II/175]

For now we will set this matter aside, and relate a new story about King Chiang In.²

The king sat on the jeweled throne, surrounded by his resplendent queens and palace ladies, bowing their heads to pay respects to the monarch. Their fragrance was refreshing and soothing.

Every one was fair and lovely in face, beautiful in head, hair and breast. Their radiant complexions alone were a feast for the eye and an invitation to love.

Their hair-pieces were woven with nodding artificial flowers. They wore upper cloths embroidered on the front with lines of silver and gold. At dusk, the evening gong sounded, and the king entered his bedchamber.

A mahori ensemble played a lullaby as beautiful as heavenly music, while the righteous king quietly day-dreamed.

He had heard the stories, spreading to cities far and wide, about the captivating beauty of Nang Soi Thong, who had just reached fifteen years, the age of blooming.

She was the daughter of the King of Lanchang and so superlatively beautiful that no other lady of a hundred-and-one cities was comparable.

‘How can I secure her as a love partner to embrace tightly and keep by my side. Should a missive be sent to the King of Lanchang to ask for her hand in the proper way?’

¹This incident echoes a story which appears in the Ayutthaya chronicles in the mid-sixteenth century, with the roles of various cities altered. Lanchang sent a missive asking for the hand of Princess Thepkasat of Ayutthaya. As Ayutthaya was under pressure from Pegu and wanted Lanchang as an ally, King Chakkaphat agreed, and invited Lanchang to send an escort to collect her. Thammaracha of Phitsanulok, who at this point was allied with Pegu, intercepted the party on the way back to Lanchang and captured the princess to present to the King of Pegu. Ayutthaya and Lanchang both sent armies with the aim of capturing Thammaracha and retrieving the princess. From this point, the story changes. With help from Pegu, Phitsanulok defeated the Ayutthaya and Lanchang forces, and subsequently Phitsanulok and Pegu besieged and took Ayutthaya in 1569 (RCA: 51-7). The Lao version differs slightly in the details. The original match was a consequence of a 1560 treaty of friendship between Lanchang and Ayutthaya recorded on an inscription found at Dansai. (Stuart-Fox, *Lao Kingdom*, 81).

²The King of Chiang Mai who featured in the war over Chiang Thong in chapters 11-12. In the original, the word *phichai*, meaning victory/victorious is added to his title in this line. Chiang In is really a synonym for Chiang Mai. It is used for the name of the king, but in the original is very occasionally used to refer to the city. To limit confusion, in the translation Chiang In is reserved for the king and the city is always referred to as Chiang Mai.

Or should the fourfold troops³ go to besiege the city and seize the princess? How should I get her, by good means or bad?’

He could not decide, and thinking over this problem made him unsettled and unable to sleep into the night.

He lay with his hand flung across his forehead. ‘How can I arrange this romance? What will be the best tricks and tactics? I can’t see the way to get her.’ [176]

With nobody to consult, he pondered the rights and wrongs of the issue until he dropped off in the first watch and slept through to dawn.

The king rinsed his mouth and bathed his face. Carrying his splendid sword, he went out to the audience hall to command the senior officials

to call the nobles to audience immediately. Guards took the order, brought hands to their chest in salute, and ran off in all directions.

‘Sire, please hurry to the audience. I don’t know whether the matter at hand is something heavy or light, but the king will be angry if you arrive late so please don’t delay.’

The nobles arrived at the screen, and peered in. The loudness of the king’s voice made their hair stand on end. They made obeisance together, and entered on all fours with their minds racing and hearts pounding.

Inside they all prostrated, and the king spoke immediately. ‘Now you’re all here, I want to hear your opinions, so please speak out.

At present I’m greatly taken by the daughter of the King of Lanchang, called Nang Soi Thong. How should I get this princess? Should I compose a missive in a spirit of friendship

to ask for her hand in the manner of royalty? Do you think this might be refused? Or should troops be sent to besiege their city and seize her?

In my opinion, these are the alternatives. Whoever has a view, speak up immediately. Consult among yourselves on what’s best.’

The Lao⁴ lords and officials all made obeisance on the spot, and conferred together on the king’s request.⁵

³ Literally *jaturong*, the four types of troops, meaning elephant, horse, carriage, foot (Red: 678)

⁴ Until Lanna was absorbed into Siam in the late nineteenth century, Ayutthaya/Bangkok used the term Lao to describe both the Lanna and Lanchang kingdoms and peoples.

⁵ ชงกา, *chongka*, old word meaning a royal order (Red:312). Prince Damrong thought this is an old chapter, dating back before the Second Reign. Khun Wichitmatra (Red : 312-3) commented it may be any time from

The Upahat⁶ and senior officials came to an agreement, and the lesser officials in order of seniority signed their names on the document, then all together presented their response to the king.

‘I, Phraya Maen, the Upahat, along with Saen Thao Krungkan,⁷ the senior military officer, the brave and powerful Phia Kanji, and all the senior officials are in agreement [177]

on the issue which the king has raised over this princess of Lanchang. As she is also of royal lineage, it would be proper to make a request first.

This will be correct according to royal procedure. If the request is refused, once that it known, then troops may be sent to besiege the city and seize her.

None of the Lao countries and cities would express disapproval. A missive must be sent to ask for the hand of this charming princess.’

Hearing his officers’ address, the king slapped his thigh. ‘That’s the nub of it! Prepare a missive along those lines in the style of royal friendship,

and send it along with golden flowers⁸ and other articles of tribute. Arrange everything to arrive at their capital within one month. Don’t delay. Go there quickly.’

The Upahat arranged for the missive to be prepared on a sheet of gold, and for tribute articles to be sent in.

The senior military officers, Thao Krungkan and Saentri Phetkla,⁹ were assigned to guard the tribute along with five hundred conscripts and full equipment including horses.

When everything was ready, they came to report to King Chiang In. After they described the contents of the missive, the king gave his approval and ordered them to leave immediately.

Thao Krungkan and Saentri Phetkla made obeisance to take leave, mounted their horses, and hastened away with all the equipment.

late Ayutthaya to the First Reign, but cannot date it exactly. He suggested that the scene on the reception of the Lanchang envoy in Ayutthaya is similar to the description of the reception of envoys from Tavoy in 1791 in the chronicles (see appendix to the chapter), and wonders if the writer was a noble present at the time (Red:314-5). The writer clearly shows intimate knowledge of court procedure.

⁶ Northern version of *uparat*, the second king.

⁷ The great lord of the black city.

⁸ The presentation of artificial flowers of gold and silver as symbolic tribute probably began in the Malay world and later spread throughout Southeast Asia.

⁹ Valiant diamond. In the original, he appears here as Saen Phet but, to avoid confusion, in the translation he is given here in the full form which appears later.

They cracked the whip and made a fast pace without resting the horses until the evening when they halted, made fires, ate, and promptly went to sleep at the third watch.

At eleven in the early dawn, they set off. At midday, they halted the troops to steam rice. After eating, they remounted and continued their journey. Sleeping at night, and setting off promptly each morning,

they reached the Lanchang customs post¹⁰ in ten days. They made a report to the officers of the post, who fed them and then escorted them to reach the city of Lanchang¹¹ in seven days. [178]

They dismounted and entered the city, guarding the tribute and missive. The Upahat and senior officials¹² [of Lanchang] gathered at the front of the palace courtyard,

seated in state. The envoys made a report on the contents of the royal missive, and were immediately taken in for audience with the city's ruler.

The King of Lanchang resided in his holy palace, contented and untroubled, surrounded by consorts and palace ladies,

all excellent and numbering in thousands, assigned to fan and minister to the monarch throughout the palace. Those serving food were dazzlingly beautiful like the ladies in the heavenly palace of Indra.

Their figure and appearance was refreshing, their fragrance uplifting. Some wore their hair in a chignon, woven with flowers and fastened with a pin.

They prostrated all over the place, with charming faces which inspired the bloom of love. Some wore upper cloths woven with dazzling colors, and rimmed with gold thread.

When they crouched in audience, their arms were elegantly soft, and their lofty hairstyles beautifully suited their faces. As the sun descended in the afternoon, the king went to bathe

in fragrant waters, and dress in royal garments infused with sweet scent. Arrayed in brilliant royal regalia, he went out to the audience hall

and sat on the nine-jeweled throne under a lofty white umbrella.

¹⁰ ด่าน, *dan*, Red:317 thinks this means the town of Nan, but more likely it means a customs post since the word is used in that sense in the journey to Ayutthaya later in the chapter.

¹¹ Vientiane. Later in the chapter, it is referred to by the Sanskrit name, Si Sattanakhannahut, or shortened versions Si Sattana and Nakhannahut. In this name, 'nak' means elephant while 'sat' and 'nahut' are numerals which together mean ten million, so the Sanskrit is similar to *lan* (million) *chang* (elephants).

¹² *Phiya kuan*. *Phiya* is an alternate spelling of *Phya*. *Kuan* is an official title used in the northern states but never in Ayutthaya, so here employed to give some local color.

He conducted the affairs of the capital, with inner officials presenting matters one after another.

The king beamed with pleasure. All were gathered together in audience. A senior noble and wise department head bowed in obeisance and spoke.

‘My liege, my life is under the royal foot of the **great monarch and creator**.¹³ Whatever pleases or displeases¹⁴ the righteous king. At present, Chiang Mai has sent a missive,

brought by a royal envoy, along with golden flowers and many articles of tribute which are under guard outside.’ Then he read the missive to the king. [179]

‘Under the sign of the mighty king of Chiang Mai, by name Chiang In, pinnacle of the palace ladies, ruler over cities and frontiers,

pillar of all the many millions of the world, to whom every territory submits without opposition, whose power is feared by every locality and every country throughout the earth,

along with the city of Nakhannahut, crown of the world, unrivalled in splendor, both of which cities nourish the earth and are equal in renown,

news has come of the princess who is beautiful, graceful, and brilliant, as well as of resplendent lineage. She should be presented in marriage to a monarch.

Ten thousand other kings of a hundred other countries are unsuitable to be partnered in happiness with such a royal lady. Unsuitable in face, and in rank lower than dust, they would besmirch and belittle your royal authority.

I ask for the hand of the princess, jewel of the eye, to be a royal lady of the right. Please grant the lovely Soi Thong to be wife¹⁵ of King Chiang In.

Once you have received this missive, if you will grant this jewel of beauty to be a gold and silver bridge to this capital, the two cities will be joyful.’ At the end of the missive, he prostrated three times.

After listening, the king was extremely angry and stamped his foot with a loud bang. ‘Lords, listen all of you.

He already has wives and children in abundance. Our child is still

¹³ *Phra itsarathirat rangsan*: great-ruler-creator.

¹⁴ *khuan mai khuan*, ‘should, should not,’ part of the formulaic opening in addressing the king, acknowledging the absoluteness of the royal power.

¹⁵ *Batborija*, literally, ‘servant of the foot.’ need to understand quite what ranking, but this is certainly not a high-ranking queen. Mc:480, “‘the feet of a maid who tries to please,’ i.e., a wife.”

tiny but he has such intentions. So arrogant! We all heard. **This missive is a good warning.**

This king does not think things through. It's laughable that he's so unafraid that people will gossip and criticize. It's shameful to come and ask for my daughter.'

Then the king said to the nobles listening, 'His words do not respect my feelings. Immediately prepare an army

to go and besiege the city of this Chiang In, and kill him. He cannot live. Chop off the heads of the people who brought the missive and stick them up in public.' [180]

He raised his sword to execute them, and stamped his foot so loudly it echoed around the audience hall. All the nobles and officials kept their faces down and mumbled prayers.

The Upahat prostrated and said, 'Oh almighty king, please stay your hand. Over the fact that the King of Chiang Mai sent this missive,

do not get too angry. You should not kill envoys at will. They are mere servants of whoever sent them. Every country will find this inappropriate.

The correct thing will be to order them to return to their city, and find a way to reply to the missive. Don't make a complaint, but be conventional and moderate. Say the lady is not suitable,

still young and not fit for marriage. Don't be aggressive and he'll accept it, believing you are reluctant to lose your child. Meanwhile, begin amassing troops to attack him.

This Chiang Mai is piffling, like a firefly imitating the sun. **With one hand, he** can be smashed to dust. When we attack, success will come in an instant.

Let that be the duty of your humble servant. The nobles, officials, and military units all agree. Do not allow any irritation under the royal foot. My liege, reply with such a missive.'

The king listened to this reasoning and calmed down. 'Have a missive prepared, and return all the tribute.

As for the envoys, give them presents – silver, gold, food, white liquor, duck, chicken, and liquor for toasting, then order them to return home.'

The envoys bowed in obeisance to take leave and went out to the guardhouse. They loaded all the goods on horses and set off. Pushing the horses at a good pace

through the forest, they reached Chiang Mai in fifteen days along with the tribute and reply missive. The lords were summoned

immediately.

The tribute was placed in front of the palace courtyard while all entered into the audience hall at the appointed time. [181]

When the king came to the audience hall, the nobles and officials prostrated. ‘My liege, your majesty, there is a palm-leaf¹⁶ missive as reply

with the sign of the King of Lanchang, father of the lovely Soi Thong, acknowledging the missive brought from Chiang Mai asking for the hand of the beautiful princess.

It says: “The mighty King Chiang In is pleased by our daughter, the gracious Soi Thong, the highest object of our concern. But this princess is only fifteen years old.

It is not yet appropriate for her to marry and become a queen. She is still a child who has not been apart from her mother for a single night. In our opinion, this is not right.

Every country will criticize, and we fear such reproach. We return the gold flowers and other presents to King Chiang In.

Proceed gradually or this will be an issue. It is better not to make the Lao reproachful.” Having read the reply to Chiang In, he prostrated.

After listening to the royal missive, King Chiang In thought, ‘The contents sound noble, but they are subterfuge.’ He spoke out,

‘We made our request in friendship in the proper way, but he did not grant us his daughter. We will now take troops, and if it comes to battle, we’ll slice them to dust –

besiege the city, chop them dead, and bring the Princess Soi Thong back here.’ With these words, he went straight inside.

The King of Lanchang sat on his glittering crystal throne, still angry

over Chiang In’s words. ‘This Chiang Mai is very arrogant.’ As his anger persisted, he summoned the queen and asked her opinion.

‘Chiang Mai recently sent a missive asking for Soi Thong as a consort. I replied with a refusal but done in the proper way. [182]

I said our daughter is still a little child, and it’s not appropriate to arrange a marriage. But if we now ignore this matter, there’ll be trouble. He’ll come to besiege and attack our city.

My jewel, what do you think? The prestige of the Thai city spreads

¹⁶ *Bailan*. Although usually known as palm-*leaf* manuscripts, the fibre comes from the branches of corypha umbraculifera, the talipot palm, native to India (Tree:851a)

far and wide. If we ask to depend on their protection, I think it'll be well-received. Don't they talk about the reputation of the righteous king of Ayutthaya,

his power extending in ten directions over all countries and languages? If we present Princess Soi Thong to him, even though Chiang Mai attacks,

the Ayutthayan army will come to help. They won't leave us to die, because the mighty king is just. What do you think? Tell me.'

Queen Keson bowed and made a wai. She thought the matter over and then said, 'I agree with what you say. There's a problem.

This king of Chiang Mai is headstrong, and boldly overrates his own status. There's no bad news about the King of Ayutthaya.

According to tradition, a tree dies because of its own seedling. We raised the beautiful Soi Thong to be someone of substance. A royal missive must be sent to offer her.

Ask them to come here to receive the princess, and to arrange the marriage. If we sit on this matter, there'll be trouble. I think your idea is appropriate.'

The king, ruler of the world, splendor of Lanchang, smiled and laughed merrily. He approved what had been said in audience. He promptly went out to the front balcony,

and gave orders for the Upahat, senior officials, and all officers to come to audience. After they made obeisance, he commanded them to arrange articles of tribute,

and to inscribe a sheet of gold with two matters. 'First, that we present our first-ranked princess to shelter under the protection of the Thai city,

because King Chiang In had sent a missive asking for her hand but we declined. Second, that these articles of tribute are presented to the King of Ayutthaya.' [183]

Senior officials took the orders and hastened away. They arranged a great amount of tribute, and a gold sheet inscribed with the missive, along with elephants, horses, and conscript troops.

When all was ready, they attended on the king, the splendor of Lanchang, who commanded that the tribute should go immediately to Ayutthaya.

The senior officers made obeisance to take leave, and crawled back out. They boarded a boat and crossed the river to the big landing at

Pak Mong.¹⁷

There they mounted horses and hurried through forest, hill and plain, past the customs post at San Hill.¹⁸

They halted the horses and let them crop grass enough to overcome fatigue. In a sluggish wind, they remounted to continue. At midday, they stopped to sleep in the forest, then continued past Sam Mo¹⁹

to the Chi River, then further through the forest, spurring the horses and cracking their whips, to the customs outpost for the Khorat territory. They entered the post to find Meun Wai,

and informed him about the royal missive. The people from the post escorted them straight down to Khorat where they tethered the horses, took rest, and entered the city.

They went to the central sala and informed officers about the matter. The Lao and the tribute were placed under guard in the city.

The governor arranged lodgings and food for the soldiers who merrily ate sweet and savory, and drank white liquor.

Understanding the business of the missive, the governor of Khorat and local officials promptly wrote a report, and commanded some Thai to carry it down.

The report conveyed the contents of missive – that many Lao nobles, officials and men had arrived bringing golden flowers and other tribute to present to the King of Ayutthaya.

The deputy secretary²⁰ assigned to carry the report prepared conscripts, servants, swords, lances, and well-bred horses, then set off through the forest. [184]

They passed Phu Khao Lat,²¹ Sung Ngoen, and Khok Phya,²² then dismounted to rest the tired horses. In the afternoon, they

¹⁷ Now Nam Mong, slightly downstream from Vientiane on the opposite bank in Amphe Tha Bo.

¹⁸ The Khao San gap, 60 kms southwest of Vientiane, is a narrow pass through a steep ridge which divides the Mekong plain from the valley of the Chi River. The pass was the site of a critical battle in the 1827 war between Bangkok and Vientiane (Mayoury and Pheuiphanh, 203). In this text, it is spelt _____, Shrine Hill. In the account of the 1827 war in the Third Reign chronicle, it is spelt _____, Essence Hill (Kennedy 1970). The modern spelling is _____, Milled Rice. Has the name of this place, at least as seen from Bangkok, changed from Shrine Hill to Essence Hill to Milled Rice while retaining the same sound?

¹⁹ Probably Chong Sam Mok in Amphoe Khon Sawan, Chaiyaphum. This place also figured in the 1827 war, as a lookout post for the Lao defence of Nong Bua Lamphu (M&P, 199).

²⁰ *Rong palat*.

²¹ Just on the northwestern edge of Khorat city.

²² A village in Amphoe Sung Ngoen.

remounted,

crossed the Kheunlan hill,²³ galloped ahead to the Dong Phya Fai,²⁴ and in five nights reached Kaeng Khoi.²⁵

In the evening they bathed and ate, and at dawn mounted and continued at a gallop. In six nights and seven days²⁶ they reached the capital.

They delivered the report to the duty guard at Mahatthai, and explained its contents in detail. The duty officer escorted them to inform Phraya Jakri about the contents of the report from Khorat.

All the nobles discussed the report and the fact that Lanchang wished to present tribute. Then they went in to attend on the king.

The king, crown of the city, lived in a glittering crystal palace, in a state of superlative bliss

and perfect content. All around, ten thousand consorts of exquisite beauty presented their faces and attended on the monarch.

Arrayed in magnificent raiment, a glittering diamond crown on his head, ornaments of gems and gold hanging on his breast, and a short sword in hand, the king emerged.

Guards unbolted the door. Horns were blown. Gong, drum, flute, shenai, khaek drum, and Java flute played brightly. The nobles bustled about in surprise.

The chaophraya and phraya took up positions. Lesser people sat hidden behind screens. They hushed one another to quieten down. Some trembled, bowed their faces, and prayed.

The curtain was swept aside, and the nobles prostrated, their hearts fluttering as if singed by the Prince of Hell. When the king spoke, they saw he was in a good mood, and relaxed somewhat. Those with important business addressed him.

‘The rains and the river flow are good.’ ‘The first and second crops of rice are plentiful.’ ‘The people are happy every day.’ The king laughed heartily at these reports. [185]

Chaophraya Jakri²⁷ addressed the king. ‘May I beg royal blessing on my head. A report has come from Khorat that some Lao have come through the forest to that place.

They are servants of the King of Lanchang with a missive to

²³ Now at the eastern tip of the Lamtakong reservoir.

²⁴ The forest-clad escarpment separating the Isan plateau from the Chaophraya plain. The name can translate as ‘Forest of the Lord of Fire,’ alluding to its reputation for malaria and other forest fevers.

²⁵ At the foot of the escarpment, on the Pasak River, now a congregation of cement factories.

²⁶ This would be the total time from Khorat to Ayutthaya.

²⁷ The text calls him Ratchasi, part of his official title (Red: 321-2).

present a princess, and a great quantity of tribute. They are being held at Ratchasima.²⁸

This is the report that has come from Khorat to inform the foot of the righteous King Phanwasa.’

The king, ruler of the world, was supremely pleased. He turned to ask his senior officials how they thought about this.

‘A foreign city comes to present a princess. Do you think this is genuine, or a military stratagem that should arouse our suspicion? Whoever has an opinion, speak.’

The nobles bowed, wai-ed, and replied that what Lanchang had sent

did not seem to be a ploy. They presented the princess in hope of depending on the king’s power. Hence they should be received and brought down.

The king agreed, and laughed heartily. ‘Hey, inner guards. Go up to Khorat immediately

to receive the envoy carrying the missive, all the troops, the tribute, gold trays and all of that. Prepare good boats to bring them.’

Jameun Ratchamat²⁹ crawled back out to organize the boats. Oarsmen boarded and rowed off.

In one night they arrived at Tha Rap.³⁰ Conscript porters landed with their shoulder poles, and walked through the forest, reaching Khorat in five nights.

When they presented their sealed order and explained its contents, the local officials bustled about in noisy confusion to assemble the tribute. They set off by elephant and horse [186]

to the landing where they boarded the boats. The troops rowed non-stop, chivvying one another to hurry, to reach the city in one day.

As soon as the boats moored, the royal missive was invited³¹ to be placed on a ceremonial tray, and borne along in procession with drums sounding loudly, and noisy crowds of people.

²⁸ An alternative name for Khorat.

²⁹ The palat of left division of the department of the inner guard, sakdina 800 (*KTSD*, I, 284; Red: 324).

³⁰ The flat landing. In Ton Than village, Amphoe Sao Hai, just west of Saraburi on the bank of the Pasak River. King Rama V visited this spot and was so impressed by its serenity that he chose it as one of the five sources of water to be used in palace ceremonies.

³¹ In the custom of such embassies, the missive is treated with the same respect that would be shown to its author.

At the palace, the missive was invited up the hall³² where a scribe³³ received it and passed it on to senior officials for translation into Thai, with each point copied.

The envoys were lodged, fed, and taken care of, with a feast of duck, chicken, white spirit, and toasts provided by the king every day.

The mighty king, ruler of the blessed city of Ayutthaya, went out before his officials. All government officers entered

and made obeisance to the feet of the supreme king. All the many who usually attended audience were present according to their position.

Chaophraya Jakri raised his hands pressed together above his head, and addressed the king. ‘My life is under the royal foot.

As to the royal order to go Khorat, Jameun Ratchamat and his troops went to receive the envoy, tribute, and royal missive, and have brought them to Ayutthaya.

They have been lodged, fed, and looked after. I will now inform under the foot of the righteous king on the contents of the royal missive.

In the missive, the king of Wiang,³⁴ ruler over the royal wealth of the city of Nakhannahut, upholder of truth and thamma, pays his respects to the King of Ayutthaya,

the great, who resides under a white umbrella higher than any king in all directions. He begs to present tribute of gold to the capital of Si Ayutthaya,

whose king has such renown that every country quails and submits, who protects the mass of the people so they are valiant and joyful, [187]

who upholds the ten royal virtues,³⁵ who governs justly and honestly by principle. As the King of Lanchang wishes to request the protection of your royal power until his dying day,

he begs to present his daughter as a servant to the royal foot of the great and glorious king, descendant of a brilliant royal line. Your

³² The official translation hall (*ho plae phraratchasat*) was opposite Wat Thammikarat (Red: 324).

³³ *alak*, a scribe in the palace.

³⁴ *Wiangjan*, city of the moon, Vientiane.

³⁵ *Thot phit*, a shortened form of *thotsaphit ratchatham*, the ten royal virtues, a code of conduct for a righteous king. The virtues are: munificence, moral living, generosity, justice, compassion, absence of bad ambition, suppression of anger, non-oppressiveness, and upholding *thamma*.

humble servant presents his respects

that the princess has not yet been sent as it is not wished that she pass through the forest for fear that she may be seized by robbers and lost completely.

If troops from Ayutthaya come to receive the princess, there should be no danger that she will be waylaid in the forest.

Also it will convey great honor, which will spread by word of mouth to other cities, that the Thai city went to receive the royal princess.

If this is not to the royal liking, reply to this missive accordingly. We beg to entrust our daughter and ourselves until death.

This matter is not a military stratagem. Do not be wary and suspicious. We have spoken as a king and will not retract.’ Each point was read to inform the king.

The King of Ayutthaya immediately ordered that preparations be made to receive official guests.

‘Conscript soldiers and volunteers, both front and rear. Prepare the palace and set up regalia. Harness the elephants and horses which dignify the city.’ The king walked back inside.³⁶

Palace officials quickly went off with the king’s commands. Duty officers wrote out orders. ‘Raise conscripts according to position as previously.

Requisition bows, bucklers, shields, pikes, and spears according to the procedure of the left and right divisions of sentinels.³⁷ Have everyone send their attendants. Be ready by dawn tomorrow.’

The military units, all carrying weapons and equipped with military gear of several types, were packed close together and arrayed according to custom. [188]

The archery unit wore trousers and hats bound with cloth. The elephant brigade³⁸ sat carrying shields, some with swords slung over their shoulders on a length of patterned cloth.

The spear unit carried their weapons and looked skilled. Many conscripts, drilled in bearing firearms, wore red shirts and red hats, with some carrying round-shields. They were all well-built and sat in

³⁶ The description of the reception of the envoy has many close parallels with the account of the reception of an envoy from Tavoy in 1791 in the chronicle of the First Reign, leading to speculation that the author was a noble present at that event. On that occasion, Tavoy sought the protection of Ayutthaya and presented a princess and tribute in exactly the same way as this account. Also the envoy was halted at Kanchanaburi while a message was sent ahead, in the same way this embassy is halted at Khorat. See the appendix to this chapter. (Red:323)

³⁷ กลาบท, *kalabat*, a division of the guard defined as those who stand watch by the lamps.

³⁸ *Lom wang*, a unit of war elephants with the duty of destroying an enemy camp (RI:995).

rows.

Conscripts drilled in the farang way sat in groups wearing shirt and hat accordingly. Each carried a gun with a bayonet, and their solid physique made an impression.

Victory bands with drum, horn, and conch wore striped trousers and hats of a different type. Large numbers of people, segregated into different types, lined the route.

In the audience hall, carpets were laid, new screens and curtains were installed, and regalia were placed in front of the curtain, including three-tier umbrellas spaced in rows.

The various tribute was placed in front of the screens. Seats were provided for the official guests straight in front of the royal throne.

Pages and palace officials crowded in wearing lower cloths. Then all the nobles entered and assumed their usual positions,

wearing sombak and embroidered robes, with golden trays placed in front of them. The four ministers of city, palace, treasury, and lands entered with the left and right divisions of the inner guard.

Khaek and Farang filed in dressed in turbans, tailored shirts tucked in the waist, and sashes tied with a flap at the front. They came as ornaments of the city.

Ten thousand gallant, robust, and battle-hardened troops arrived in columns. Pavilions were set up for standing elephants in the middle of the courtyard, along with many fine royal horses.

Sentinels were placed sitting at the front and back. The front of the main courtyard overflowed with Khaek, Farang, Chinese and Cham, seated according to royal command.

The almighty king, more excellent than the monarchs of all other territories, went to bathe in the flowing waters of the stream of the golden lotus. [189]

He washed away all dirt and dust, and was anointed with fragrant scent. He put on a yok in flying kanok pattern with Garuda clenching in his beak a naga that wound round his body,

and a robe with an elegant pattern of intertwined vines,³⁹ dazzlingly embroidered in gold, with the vine flowers done in appliqué.⁴⁰

He held the great sword named Diamond Heart,⁴¹ with a twined and tasseled sash, and a handle embellished with many brilliant

³⁹ *Khrua lada*, same as *khrua thao*, see *pix* in RI:1412.

⁴⁰ Applique is the nearest equivalent. The embroidery is cut so the flowers 'float' above the surface of the fabric.

⁴¹ พระแสงองค์ใหญ่ใจเพชร, *Phrasaeng ong yai jai phet*, a regalia sword mentioned in the accounts of the coronations of King Uthumphon in 1758 and in ceremonies of early Bangkok (Red: 326).

jewels that glittered beautifully.

He went out to the portico-ed throne hall⁴² decorated with glittering crystal and gold. The victory drum, horn, and conch waited in line. The head drummer beat to announce the king's entry.

The curtain attendants pulled back the curtain. The mass of nobles trembled. Luang Ratchamanu⁴³ raised the insignia of golden flowers. The horn and conch play loudly.

All the officials made obeisance, bowed, and prostrated. The king immediately sent for the official guests.

Phra Ammat⁴⁴ passed the royal order to [Jameun] Ratchaban⁴⁵ to fetch them. Inner guards rushed off. Attendants brought the guests into the audience.

In front of the throne, they all made obeisance, raising their trembling hands in wai, and prostrating to pay their respects.

Luang Ratchanikun⁴⁶ addressed the king. 'My liege, oh righteous king, the envoys have come to attend under the foot of the righteous king.'

The mighty king looked around to see the envoys paying obeisance, along with the golden tribute.

He said,⁴⁷ 'How many days did you travel through the dense forest to reach the city; was the journey difficult or easy?'

At Nak city, is the rice season good, or is there drought making rice troublingly expensive, and are enemies to the north and south satisfactorily quiet? [190]

Is the King of Vientiane well and content, untroubled by disease, and are things well in Vientiane?'

⁴² The hall has a portico which extends out from the main building (Red:679).

⁴³ Head of the department of victory drums, sakdina 1000 (*KTSD*, I, 300; Red: 327). The insignia of the golden flowers is a representation of a bunch of flowers in gold on the end of a staff, carried ahead of the king to announce his arrival. A twin officer, Thepmanu, had the duty to raise a silver version (Prachak: 202; Suphon 314-5).

⁴⁴ Probably Luang Maha-ammatthibodi Phiriyakaha, officer in Mahathai with responsibility for the north, sakdina 3000 (*KTSD*, I, 225; Red: 327).

⁴⁵ Palat of the left department of the outer guard, sakdina 800 (*KTSD*, I, 290; Red 327).

⁴⁶ Khun Ratchanikun Nityaphakdi, palat of *thun chalong toe sakdi* in Mahathai (*KTSD*, I, 224; Red: 327). In the 1791 Tavoy embassy (see note above), this same official read the embassy's missive (see appendix to this chapter).

⁴⁷ This is a diplomatic formula known as *Phraratchapatisanthan sam nat*, the three royal greetings – asking after the journey, the situation in the envoy's country, and the health of the envoy's ruler. The three positive responses are likewise a formula.

The envoys responded, 'My liege, great king. The journey here took forty days and was comfortable. Our city is happy and without problems.

The first and second crops of rice are excellent with no cause for shortage. No enemies have approached the city.

The king, ruler of the city, finds his power spreading in every direction. He is happy all the time and untroubled by disease.'

The king was pleased by this answer, and made gifts of clothing and good silk, and ordered pleasant lodgings.

Seven days later, all the officials again gathered to make obeisance. The king commanded the envoys to return. 'Conscript five hundred immediately.

Phra Thainam⁴⁸ will lead the escort. Prepare reciprocal presents of colored silk, silver, gold, other valuables, and a female royal elephant with a golden howdah.

Prepare a missive on gold with no dreary mistakes in wording. Take lances, pikes, javelins, and golden spears to guard against danger.'

Officials took the orders and backed out of the audience. They arranged many conscripts and volunteers, excellent and glittering articles of tribute, magnificent elephants and horses, fine gems,

lances, pikes, javelins, and guns. They also prepared the royal missive. They attended on the king and were commanded to depart.

The envoy, Phra Thainam, led the troops out of the capital, with crowds of elephants and horses, and a noisy tumult from gunfire and yodeling.

At dusk, they drove in spikes to set up camp, and dragged logs from the forest to make fires. From morning through afternoon to evening, they traveled without rest, reaching their destination in one month and ten days. [191]

On the bank at Phan Phrao⁴⁹ opposite the city of Si Sattana, they halted the troops and sent Phya Suwannabat ahead.

He greeted the Upahat and local officials, and informed them they had arrived from the southern city. The king and all those in

⁴⁸ Along with Phraya Decho, one of the two commanding officers in Kalahom, each with a sakdina of 10,000 on par with Kalahom himself, in command of the six volunteer groups. His full title was Okphya Siharat Dechachai Thainam Aphaiphiriyapra Kromphahu (*KTSD*, I, 280; *Kukrit*: 254; *Red*: 329; *Suphon* 306).

⁴⁹ Across the Mekong from Vientiane in Amphoe Si Chiangmai. In the early nineteenth century maps, it is marked as Muang Phan Phao (*RSM*: 131. 137).

attendance convened in the audience hall immediately.

When the almighty king looked around and saw Phya Suwannabat, his face lit up like the moon shining in the sky.

‘You went down to the southern city. What happened? Tell me quickly? Is the King of Ayutthaya’s reply good or bad?’

Phya Suwannabat made obeisance. ‘The king of the Thai city of Ayutthaya asked after your royal foot,

and gave presents including a great deal of clothing and fine silk. He sent Phra Thainam with troops to present tribute and receive the princess.’

For the king, the Phya’s confident address was like celestial waters. He ordered officers to erect an inner pavilion beside the hall

to receive Phra Thainam and the many conscripts brought with him. He specially commanded that the troops from the Thai capital be well fed and looked after.

He turned to command the Upahat to arrange the reception of the southern envoys, then went into the elegant inner palace.

Officials called up both major guards and royal conscripts to erect the pavilion ordered by the king within three nights.

The Upahat issued call-up notices to conscript a large number of boats and oarsmen needed to cross to the other side of the river. Arriving at Phan Phrao, he went straight in

to invite Phra Thainam to bring all his officers and men to the palace. They halted at the hall and were given a special feast. [192]

They ate in groups. The Lao gave directions to bring sticky rice to ease their aching legs and backs,⁵⁰ five or six chili dips,⁵¹ *namya* fish curry with *khanom jin* noodles,

and chili paste with *makhaen*⁵² fruit and giant catfish roe. The servants wanted to make it that spicy. After eating, they were escorted to the pavilion for official guests.

The King of Lanchang bathed, dressed, and came out to the elegant audience hall which was packed with officials in attendance.

He sent for Phra Thainam. Lao guards with tattooed legs ran off

⁵⁰ not sure about this, but that’s what it seems to say.

⁵¹ *Jaeo*.

⁵² หมากมอด, *makmat*, better known as มะขามขี้หนู, *makhaen*, a tree with green-brown berry-like fruits used in cooking (Tree:197).

and presented themselves to him. ‘Sir, we invite you to the audience hall.’

Phra Thainam ordered his men to carry the tribute over. He entered the audience of the ruler of Vientiane, presented his missive, and made obeisance.

Senior officials received the missive, unfolded it, and read it out. ‘In the manner of a royal missive, the King of Ayutthaya,

who lives under the white umbrella in the radiant holy golden palace, has learnt that the city of Nakhannahut wishes to present a beautiful princess.

The king will take great pleasure to be joined in marriage with her as a major queen.⁵³ He will send for the princess to be received and brought down.’

After the missive was read, the Lao nobles bowed and wai-ed to pay their respects.⁵⁴ Phra Thainam addressed the king, ‘This tribute of many types,

I am under royal command to present under the foot of the royal lord protector.’ He paid his respects and waited for the king’s response.

The King of Nakhannahut was well pleased. He said to Phra Thainam, ‘In fifteen days, we shall send the princess down.’

He left the audience hall of royal victory. Phra Thainam paid his respects, took leave, and went to stay in lodging with his troops.

⁵³ The missive employs the term อรรคมเหษี, *akkamahesi*, which places her among the ‘royal wives,’ a category usually reserved for wives from the dynasty itself or other recognized ruling families (especially from tributary states). Chiang Mai had proposed only to make her a *batborija*, servant of the royal foot, a consort of significantly lower ranking. The politics of this chapter clearly reflect the early years of the Chakri era. Although Chiang Mai was an ancient capital, it was devastated in the wars of the late eighteenth century. The ruler was restored by the Siamese, but the place remained small and weak for many years, and the rulers constantly tried to ease free of Siamese domination. In this chapter, the Chiang Mai ruler is presented as a bit of a joke. By contrast, Lanchang survived the Burmese wars with much less damage. It became tributary to Siam, but was treated with some respect as a potential major ally in the northern frontier region. Future successors to the royal line were brought to Bangkok for education, and possibly this chapter was compiled in part with such education in mind. These relations changed dramatically in the 1820s when Bangkok and Lanchang became competitors for control of the Isan plateau, culminating in the sack of Vientiane in 1827-8. This chapter must have been written before that.

⁵⁴ Again, the missive is treated with some of the formality due to its author.

Appendix: The embassy from Tavoy in 1791, from the chronicle of the First Reign.

The incident arose because the governor of Tavoy defied the King of Ava's wish to replace him. Here is the extract from the Floods' translation of the chronicle:

The governor of Tavoy was afraid that the King of Ava might send an army to attack his territory and that he would not be able to withstand the attack, for he could expect no help from anywhere. He therefore decided to submit his territory as a vassal of Bangkok, seeking the power of the king of the Thai capital as his protection and asking for a Thai army to help defend his territory....

The governor then selected a woman of beautiful form, a younger sister of his own wife, to be sent to present to the king. He then ordered a letter of state composed and inscribed on a gold sheet in a Pagan script according to the Burmese tradition. The import of the letter of state was to place his territory as a vassal state under Ayutthaya [Siam], and to ask for an army to help defend his territory, and at the same time to present the lady to the king....

They proceeded by way of Kanchanaburi. The territorial functionaries at Kanchanaburi sent word to Bangkok. The king issued an order under official seal appointing his own royal representatives to go out and meet the Tavoy embassy and escort them in.

On Saturday, the third day of the waning moon of the fourth month, the members of the Tavoy embassy, namely, ten Buddhist monks, one Chesunaratamitkayochawa, one Nakhantariangsa, one Adunnaresoitonglakwaenoraba, and the Tavoy lady, who had arrived in Bangkok, translated a letter from the governor of Tavoy as follows:

“Maengchancha, the Burmese governor of Tavoy, the son of Sadumaengkong, whose stipend consists of the taxation collected from Makkarabo, and who is a high-ranking military officer in Ava, begs to pay respects to Your Majesty the King at Bangkok....

Now Mergui and Tanao know that Tavoy is seeking the protection of Your Majesty the King at Bangkok and they, too, ask to place themselves as Your Majesty's vassal territories. We therefore selected a young maiden and prepared the Gold and Silver Trees to be presented to Your Majesty. We further volunteer our services to attack Martaban, Rangoon, Chittagong, and Phasim. We promise to seize these territories for Your Majesty within the fourth month of the Year of the Pig.”

Thus ended the letter from the governor of Tavoy.

The Samuha-nayok (Chief Minister of Civil Affairs) brought this matter to the king's attention. On learning of it, the king ordered that the emissaries from Tavoy be lodged at the State Guest House. He gave instructions that the Tavoy visitors, including the officials and their retinue, be afforded every comfort. Maha Thaen was sent to stay at the Bangwayai Temple. The king ordered that all preparations be made according to traditional customs for receiving state visitors as observed by previous reigns.

After the preparations were made, the king appeared in royal audience at the Dusitmahaprasat Hall with his government ministers and royal attendants of high and low ranks and from both the military and the civil sections assembled in rows on the left and the right in accordance with their status. The state visitors from Tavoy were then presented to the king. They entered between the rows of officials and paid homage to him. Phraya Ratchanikun presented to the king the gifts they had brought as tribute. He then read out the letter of state from the governor of Tavoy that was inscribed on the gold sheet. It read:

“I, Maengchancha, beg to salute / Your Majesty the King of Bangkok. Formerly the territory under my rule was a vassal territory of Ava. Now, I have come to a break in relations with the King of Ava. The King of Ava is going to send a Burmese army to ravage and trample Tavoy, causing great suffering to to the monks, the Brahmins, the teachers, the freemen, and the common people there.

“I have nowhere else to turn for help, and I thus beg for Your Majesty’s protection over the lives of all the animals and people in Tavoy that they may be spared the dangers from the enemy. I beg for Your Majesty’s grant of an army to assist me in the protection of my territory.

“In addition, I present to Your Majesty a lady who is a relative of mine, to enter into Your Majesty’s service....

“I myself, together with the administrative officials of Tavoy, Mergui, and Tanao as well as the populations of these three territories, beg to place ourselves as vassals of Bangkok, as was the case in earlier times, from now until the end of the world.”

After the letter of state was read out to the king, he conversed with the foreign ambassadors as was the custom and then left the audience. The chief ministers then led the state guests from the audience hall to the Sala Lukkhun Mahatthai (Court of Ministry of Civil Affairs), where food had been set out for a reception for them.

....The king therefore asked that robes and articles for monks be presented to Maha Thaen and articles of clothing and money be presented as well to the ambassadors. A suitable return gift was also provided for the governor of Tavoy.

[The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, The First Reign, Chaophraya Thiphakorawong Edition. tr and ed by Thadeus and Chadin Flood. Vol I, Text. Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo 1978. pp. 176-82]