

DROPPING ARTILLERY, LOADING RICE AND ELEPHANTS: A SPANISH AMBASSADOR IN THE COURT OF AYUDHYA IN 1718

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Preamble

This work is part of a larger study and translation of a 400-page eighteenth century Spanish manuscript, which is an account by a Spanish ambassador of his embassy to the Ayudhya or Ayutthaya kingdom in 1718. I introduced this manuscript in the International Association of Historians of Asia (IAHA) Conference in Tokyo in 1995 but, at that time, I had just begun to translate the account and had not made a fuller reading of its content. In this chapter I limit myself to the behavior of the Spanish ambassador and the kind of diplomatic engagement that transpired, whose direction and conduct turned out the way it did, I believe, largely because of the ambassador's aggressive and shrewd behavior. I think that the Spanish ambassador makes for an interesting subject of study, given his particular conduct and the world in which his actuations might have been situated. Here I shall relate how he pushed not only the goals of his embassy but also, many times appearing more important, how he projected his own persona and his level of representation, which he claims spoke for the 'most powerful king' in the world. Of course, the kind of diplomacy that occurred was not a one-way process. It also turned out in the peculiar manner it did because the Siamese monarchy played out its historic part, which was to assert its own traditional protocols and its self-esteem as a kingship in this part of the world. Similar European embassies had visited Ayudhya in the past but I am inclined to think that the Spanish embassy of 1718 could stand out in the boldness and self-centeredness of its demands. Interesting is that these demands focused more on the kind of reception the embassy sought. One can imagine how such an embassy could have dealt with an equally self-centered kingship. But they did meet eyeball to eyeball and produce a great treaty.

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Introduction

In the summer of the year 1718 in Filipinas, then Governor Fernando Manuel Bustamante Bustillo dispatched his nephew Alexandro Bustamante as ambassador plenipotentiary² to Siam in a diplomatic mission to import rice³ and renew friendly and commercial ties with the Ayudhya kingdom. Alexandro's account of that mission spells out the problems that prompted the governor's action. In the opening page of his account, Alexandro right away presents the most pressing reason for the voyage to Siam—a severe shortage of rice that struck the country following a locust infestation, which devastated rice fields from 1717 to 1718. The ambassador indicates a wide coverage by pointing out that the 'plague' had affected the islands 'from Pangasinan to Panay,' two areas that today are still considered main producers of rice in the Philippines. Alexandro adds:

(The) *alcaldes mayores* (to whom are charged the collection and remittance of rice) sent the testimonies and certifications of the priests to attest to the plague so that they would be relieved from the obligation. So severe was the shortage of grain that its cost reached 3 pesos per fanega or cavan when before it would not exceed 4 reales. In this regard, the City councilors gathered in repeated meetings and recognized the total annihilation threatening the islands if they did not turn to foreign Kingdoms to solicit an adequate quantity of grains needed to remedy such grave and general necessity to be able to have what was required to sustain the rice fields in the following years.⁴

The crisis grew from the prolonged shortage and increased prices with rampant hoarding by provincial officials and friars alike.⁵ In response to the situation, the colonial regime in Manila looked toward neighboring Siam to

² *Real Titulo de Ambaxador Plenipotenciaria* in Alexandro de Bustamante, *Breve y puntual Relacion de la Embaxada, que executo en Siam el General Don Gregorio Alexandro de Bustamante, Bustillo, y Medinilla, Manjon de Estrada, Senor, y Mayor de las Casas de su Apellido: en una epilogada descripcion de aquel Reyno, y sus costumbres; y otra muy succinta de las Islas Filipinas, sus servicios en elias, y alguna parte de los trabajos, e infotunios, que despues la han seguido*, Manila: 1719, p. 361.

³ Thaisa's reign was marked by increases in the volume of rice exports, particularly to the Chinese. It is possible that this had been known in Filipinas through Chinese traders.

⁴ Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 1-2. *Fanega* or *cavan* is equivalent to a kilogramme. One *real* is a quarter of a *peso*.

⁵ Concepcion Pajaron Parody, *El Gobierno en Filipinas de Don Fernando Manuel de Bustamante y Bustillo: 1717-1719*, Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1964, pp. 27-30.

redress the situation. The officials noted that such a mission could revive relations with that kingdom, which were closed for 60 years, recalling that the last contact was made when a Spanish ship traded with Ayudhya in 1656 in the time of King Narai.

Strategies to Assert the Goals of the Mission

Alexandro's account does not only elaborate the goals and circumstances of his mission but also demonstrates how he sought to achieve his objectives. The crisis in Manila's rice supply opened up the matter of establishing regular interaction between Siam and Filipinas, one that was useful to trade and the larger concern of sustaining the economy of Filipinas (*utiles al comercio y conservacion de las islas*).⁶ City officials recalled that trade had transpired between the two countries in the past and could provide the grounds for establishing a more permanent trade pact.⁷ This would benefit Filipinas not only to meet emergency situations in rice supply but also to avail themselves of long-term commercial opportunities or raw materials such as teak wood and iron. For the construction of galleons, teak wood was deemed the better timber, which was said not to rot under water for 40 years⁸ and could save the colonial government substantially in cost.⁹ Iron was also sought for use in the galleons and for war equipment.

On 2 March 1718, upon receiving his instructions from the governor, Alexandro set sail for Siam. Then on 3 April, after a month of voyage, the ambassador dropped anchor at the Gulf of Siam near the mouth of the Menam River. The first thing he did was to inquire into the ways of the Siamese kingship to prepare for meeting with Siamese officials. He learned from a European hand at the royal palace that the authority of the king of Siam was projected by the practice that 'few people could see him'.¹⁰ As if to match such symbolic expression of preeminent status, Alexandro also ordered that none of those who would come on board could see him directly.¹¹ If they wanted to, they first had to meet with the *general del mar* or the admiral, Benito Carrasco, who would in turn convey to them the ambassador's response. In addition, he says, he would not write to the Siamese officials to serve notice of his arrival. This would be the task of the admiral acting in the name of the ambassador. It was also at this point that the ambassador may have been informed of a vital and obligatory protocol.

⁶ Bustamante, *Breve*, p.3.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Foreign visitors must unload their artillery and military equipment at Bangkok before going to Ayudhya for an audience with the king. To this Alexandro would seek an exemption—an act that would break custom in the Gulf. This was the manner that Alexandro made known to the Siamese king the arrival of his embassy.

On 4 April, he sought permission from the *barcalam*¹² to navigate up the river by the port of Bangkok¹³ to gain an audience with the king. The ambassador also conveyed his desire for a ‘special consideration’ not to unload artillery and military equipment because he avowed he had come ‘on behalf of the powerful king of Spain’.¹⁴

The next thing he did was to seek the support of his compatriots around the palace of the Siamese king to seek their support in establishing the credibility of his embassy. Aside from the letter to the *barcalam*, other letters were sent to religious leaders who had been posted for some time in the region such as the Apostolic Vicar for the kingdoms of Japan, Siam, Cochinchina and Tonkin, the Rector of the Jesuits (Antonio Suarez), the Vicar of Santo Domingo and a certain Frenchman.¹⁵ As with the *barcalam*, it was the admiral who wrote the letters to these personages, ‘asking them (on the ambassador’s behalf) to use their positions’ to get the best results from his message to the Siamese king.¹⁶ Alexandro received only the reply of the Jesuit father that however brought official news, indicating his closeness or connections with the palace circle. The king had now known the arrival of Alexandro’s mission and would send a mandarin called Olvantipadi to inquire into whether his ships belong to the Spanish king or to that of the governor of Filipinas. The Jesuit father wrote that the king wanted to ascertain the representation of Alexandro.

Olvantipadi arrived on the same day that the letter of the Jesuit father came. He promptly went about his business, which was exactly what the Jesuit father apprised Alexandro of in his letter, that is, to inquire about Alexandro’s official representation and the details about the personnel and military equipment on board his galleons. To this Alexandro replied that he

¹² *Phrahklang*, the Minister of the Treasury who also functioned as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and handled trade with foreigners.

¹³ Gervaise describes Bangkok as ‘the most important place in the kingdom, for it is the only place anywhere on the sea coast that could offer some resistance to enemy attack’. Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, translated and edited with an introduction and notes by John Villiers; First published in 1688; Bangkok: White Lotus, 1989, p. 49. The city was defended by two forts, equipped with cannons and defended by soldiers, which according to Gervaise at the time of his visit in the late seventeenth century were Christian mestizos. It was walled on the side of the river, certainly referring to the Chaopraya River.

¹⁴ Bustamante, *Breve*, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

was sent by the king and by the governor in the name of the king. On the 14th, Olvantipadi returned with two Portuguese interpreters and more boats. This time he asked whether the letter Alexandro would bring to the king of Siam was from the king of Spain or from the governor of Filipinas. To this Alexandro asserted that while he carried a letter from the governor, it should be considered as that of the Spanish king because the governor represented the king. On the 19th, Olvantipadi came again and asked if the embassy was from the king or from the governor, to which Alexandro answered the same as in the first two meetings. This time the mandarin formally informed the ambassador about the practice of leaving artillery and military equipment at Bangkok before going to the kingdom upstream. To this Alexandro showed adamance telling Olvantipadi that the practice was contrary to the service of his king and would discredit not only his person but also the Spanish nation. He said he would rather return to Filipinas and suffer the consequence of the king of Siam not accepting the friendly correspondence of the Spanish king.¹⁷ On the 26th, another mandarin called Guanteca came with a Spanish interpreter and transmitted the king's message that Alexandro could not be exempted from that practice. The ambassador replied with firmness, showing "some anger," that the greatness of the Spanish king should not be compared with other kings.¹⁸ The Siamese representative, as usual, wrote the ambassador's reply in Siamese characters and returned to the kingdom.

On 2 May, Siamese officials with important people, including a certain Lomocorat,¹⁹ came from the kingdom in many boats on behalf of the king. The governor of Bangkok and a *castellano* came with the entourage. This was the fifth time the Siamese officials met with Alexandro to deal with the issue of representation and arms on board. Now they conveyed a final message that it was impossible to allow the ships to move forward without leaving artillery and military equipment at Bangkok. The officials said it was incompatible to ask for the friendship of the king of Siam and at the same time 'try to compel him to abolish his laws when he was eager to maintain the most intimate friendship with the king of Spain'. But then the Siamese king had already made an adjustment. As a "gift to the ambassador," his representatives told the ambassador, that "they could leave the artillery in Bangkok but keep on board the musketry, fusillade, gunpowder and other military equipment," something that was never done before. Still, Alexandro protested and threatened to go back to Manila insisting the exemption he sought was not altering the law and setting precedent but one that was due his stature, which was different from the others.²⁰ The Siamese official, Lomocorat, now stood his ground adding that it was the king's last

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹ Probably refers to Yomarat, minister of security forces.

²⁰ Bustamante, *Breve*, p. 32.

resolution, which was even taken up in a general assembly of the kingdom's important people, and should be accepted otherwise he had an order to dismiss the ships.

Alexandro then decided to meet with his own officials to evaluate the situation. His officials expressed great apprehension and advised him to accept the position of the Siamese officials since leaving the artillery in Bangkok was of small concern when the objectives of the mission were at stake. The ambassador relented. He therefore had the mandarins summoned and informed them he had decided to give up on his part in order 'not to spoil the present situation to establish good relations between both kings'. Finally, on 8 May 1718, Alexandro received notice to go to Ayudhya. He then ordered the unloading of artillery at the port of Bangkok. In his account, Alexandro takes note that thereafter the Bangkok governor, with the *castellano* "came to demonstrate courtesy by prostration and with a gift, and it was the same with the other governors and lieutenants of the provinces who lined up the margins of the river from Bangkok to Siam." Alexandro's tack appears to have paid off.

On 12 May with a distance of one league²¹ from Siam, the mandarin Lomocorat and the interpreter Guillermo Dante arrived with the usual assemblage of boats and came on board to convey for the first time the greetings of the Siamese king. Then to prepare for the formal meeting between the two parties, Lomocorat started to brief Alexandro on Siamese protocols in meeting with the king. In the kingdom's way of things, as was done with other foreign embassies, Alexandro was supposed to present the letter and gift for the Siamese king to the *barcalam* in the latter's room, in an audience with the mandarins. The *barcalam* would also not come out to receive the ambassador at the door and would just stand without moving from his place. Then officials of the embassy would remove their shoes and the rest of the entourage would stay outside the *barcalam's* room. And then Alexandro, like in previous audiences of foreign dignitaries with the Siamese king such as the ambassador of Portugal, would also not see the face of the king.²² These conditions infuriated Alexandro. He protested the comparison of the king of Spain with other kings. He also referred to what he said was the practice in Europe that ambassadors meet kings in person. He insisted he would hand the letter only to the king. In his account, he says he told Lomocorat to inform the Siamese king so that he would personally receive the ambassador and that he would treat him (the Siamese king) "with the authority due his representation".²³

²¹ One league equals 3 nautical miles or 5.56 kilometres.

²² Bustamante, *Breve* p. 39.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

Lomocorat wrote everything in Siamese characters and went back to report to his king. When he returned, the mandarin brought concessions to the ambassador. He said the ambassador would be allowed to seat at a distance of four elbows from the *barcalam* and that the horse he would ride would be decorated with gold. He however reiterated that the ambassador had to submit the letter to the *barcalam* so that it could be translated for the king, the same procedure that other ambassadors did previously. Alexandro refused and demanded the same ‘solemnity and pomp’ shown to the king of France in the past.²⁴ Lomocorat again went back to his king. When he returned, he offered “more ostentation” in the reception for Alexandro than for the Portuguese²⁵ in the past without changing the manner the letter has to be submitted to the *barcalam* for transmission to the king.

This time Alexandro was adamant and set his own conditions for the audience with the king: *first*, that the ambassador should be accompanied by at least 24 mandarins, and his ships, by 35 boats, when the embassy meets with the king; *second*, that Carrasco, the *general del mar*, should give the letter to the *barcalam* with the mandarins in audience all standing up, and after translation, the letter should go back to the *general del mar* and Alexandro should hand it to the king; *third*, that the seat for the ambassador should be the same as that of the *barcalam* and that the latter should come out of the royal room to receive him; *fourth*, that the officials and guards who would accompany the ambassador should enter the room with their guns and not remove their shoes; *fifth*, that the gift the ambassador brings should not be given in the royal room in their boxes but taken out in the ambassador’s quarters; and *sixth*, that the king should set the date of meeting so that the ambassador could prepare all the things necessary to show the magnificence of the Spanish monarch.²⁶ In his account, Alexandro says that he also communicated to Lomocorat that he should accept the embassy so that the ambassador would not have to repeat his protests since he had already been much delayed by the exchange of questions and answers that, he says, had provoked hostility rather than friendship. Alexandro notes in his account that Lomocorat was seen as very angry and this caused the ship’s admiral and other officials much anxiety. They then warned the ambassador about the risk of antagonizing such an important person. But Alexandro’s resolute position

²⁴ This refers to two French embassies sent by Louis XIV to the court of King Narai, the first in 1685-6, led by Chevalier de Chaumont and Abbe de Choisy, and the second in 1687-88, led by Simon de la Loubere and Claude Ceberet.

²⁵ There were a number of Portuguese missions to Siam. The one sent in 1516 from Malacca, preceded by two minor missions, concluded a treaty of friendship and commerce between Portugal and Siam. This was led by Duarte de Coelho as envoy. Other engagements followed. A later mission, in 1633, ended a war between Portugal and Siam. It is not clear which of these missions were referred to by the Siamese officials.

²⁶ Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 45-48.

appears effective.²⁷ Lomocorat returned on 20 May with the Siamese king's approval of most of the ambassador's conditions. The ambassador got the reception he wanted.

On 22 June, the meeting with the king finally pushed through. The ceremonies commenced at the ambassador's palace with the usual pomp and pageantry from the stairway of his quarters to the courtyard and on to the river.²⁸ Mandarins of the first order and Europeans accompanied the ambassador. More than a hundred boats carried the gifts:

The letter in the gilded container moved on, carried on the shoulders of four mandarins, with the parasols at the sides. In front were my clarinetists and those from the king of Siam, some drummers, and the musicians of the royal palace together with mine. We arrived at one of the entrances of the city wall, from where a bridge was built, so that with convenience I could enter on the ornate skiff²⁹ on which I was on board together with my *alferez real* and important mandarins, turning over the letter to a prepared *balon* with the same proprieties and accompaniment as when I arrived in Siam, and in appropriate order of the gift, my entourage and the guards in their respective *balones*, which came by the hundred. In this manner, we navigated upstream and passed by the college seminary where the reverend bishop of Sabula resided. They rang the bells he came out of the door of the church well dressed and blessed me. I responded and asked him to lower the flag. Half a league away, we discovered the royal palace and disembarked, where at one of its doors many mandarins, countless people and the royal cavalry guard were there to receive me.³⁰

At the royal palace, the ambassador passed through three courtyards, in the first were stationed richly decorated elephants, in the second the archers, and in the third the fusiliers. Carrying the letter, he entered a room preceding the royal throne and passed between 24 prostrated mandarins of the first order, to accompany him when he hands the letter to the king, which was one of the conditions for continuing the embassy. Then he went up some steps, which brings him to the royal throne chamber, which he describes:

After going up some steps, I was at the royal throne room, all made of mirrors (a gift given to his majesty by the most Christian king Louis XIV), so perfectly conjoined that the junctures could not be seen and looked like one whole piece. Looking at an angle from the front to the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁹ Skiff is a small flat-bottom boat.

³⁰ Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 86-7.

ceiling (with much to admire in its beauty and splendor), there was a showcase with many golden jewels, the sight of which amazed me, but turning to the right I saw the king in his royal throne. The showcase covered him up to middle body because it was like a pulpit, which rose from that part, all made from top to bottom like an altarpiece of various figures and gilded ornaments, and on it were mounted gorgeous and plentiful precious stones.³¹

Lomocorat arrived at the steps of the royal throne room on his knees and accompanied him toward the throne. Following the agreed protocol, the ambassador says he gave his curtsy by removing his hat and putting it back again. The king responded by bowing his head while he held his crown to prevent it from falling due to its weight being made of gold encrusted with jewels.³²

Results of the Mission

It took Alexandro 81 days or close to three months of dealing with the representatives of the king, employing various strategies that played brinkmanship to secure the protocols and privileges that he thought were due his stature. It also took the Siamese officialdom such length of time to maintain their patience and stately bearings vis-à-vis another foreign power that seeks a favored status with the kingdom. The audience with the king was particularly significant in that the ambassador was able to get the conditions he set for holding the embassy, noteworthy of which was his being allowed to see his face, which was not the normal practice in those times.³³ On the side of the Siamese, it demonstrated their adaptability in dealing with foreign powers. The result was that the ambassador was able to personally transmit to the Siamese king the message of Governor Bustamante and supposedly of the Spanish monarch and elicit a direct response from him. Moreover, the embassy obtained favorable results for most of its objectives in coming to the kingdom.

The most immediate response was an emergency rice supply to offset the shortage in Manila. The Siamese king was prompt on this. On 24 June, the mandarin Lomocorat informed the ambassador that the king was already aware of the rice shortage and had immediately sent two *somas*³⁴ of rice to

³¹ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

³² Ibid., p. 90.

³³ The face of the Siamese king was hidden from public view, to maintain distance and preserve the sacredness of the monarchy. Thus he gave his audience from a window elevated above his subjects or visitors.

³⁴ *Soma* is a junk.

the port of Cavite ahead of the embassy's return to Manila.³⁵ Alexandro says this was done as the king expected a delay of the ambassador's return due to the indispensable ceremonies that his embassy had to go through. The ambassador responded by providing *cartas de creencias* or credential letters for the Siamese personnel in charge of the *somas* of rice so that they could be received and treated well in Manila and allowed to go to the provincial ranches to select and buy horses that they could bring to the king upon their return.

Then on 28 July, more than a month after the king's immediate action on Manila's rice shortage, a trade pact³⁶ was finally in place between Manila and Ayudhya. While benefiting the commercial interests of Siam, the pact stipulated articles that mainly responded to the needs of Manila and fulfilled the objectives of the embassy. First, it provides for the Siamese kingdom to donate a parcel of land to the Spaniards called *Campo Japon*³⁷ (which they renamed *Nuestra Senora del Soto y San Buenaventura*) for residence, worship and trading activities, including anchorage for ships, and permitted them to fly their royal flag and place a holy cross therein. Second, the kingdom allows the Spaniards to build ships in the kingdom for their trade with Mexico on condition that they pay for the teak wood and iron and compensate the local craftsmen in accordance with the wage rates in Siam.

Third, it was stipulated that no other land would be assigned to the Spaniards other than that already designated for them should they find the said land unsuitable for their purposes. Fourth, vessels coming to trade in Siam may change their *reales* with the officials of *klang*.³⁸ The commander of the site or factory is compelled to declare everything in every trip to

³⁵ Bustamante, *Breve*, p. 114. Alexandro relates however that he had not mentioned the rice shortage to the king and seems to indicate surprise how he had been aware about it. It is likely that the letter of Governor Bustamante already communicated the problem to the Siamese king. Take note that the letter was handed to the Siamese officials for translation on 22 May, one month before the audience with the king. Otherwise, it could be that somebody from his people had casually mentioned it to other Europeans who visited them on board after they dropped anchor at the Gulf of Siam and these Europeans had in turn advised people in the Siamese court, which is not farfetched in casual conversations among ordinary hands or vassals. In his account, Alexandro relates at one point that various people visited them on the ships as they waited for the reply to their initial communication to the Siamese officialdom.

³⁶ Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 140-6.

³⁷ *Campo Japon* refers to the Japanese settlement that thrived in Siam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a result of activities of Japanese adventurers and merchants who entered Siam. Relations were cut in 1630 under Prasathong, who feared a plot against him and ordered the massacre of the Japanese. Trade with Japanese merchants passed into the hands of the Chinese and the Dutch in the eighteenth century. Ishi Yoneo, 'Thai-Japanese Relations in the Pre-modern Period: A Bibliographic Essay with Special Reference to Japanese Sources', in Chaiwat Khamchoo and E. Bruce Reynolds, *Thai-Japanese Relations in Historical Perspective*, Bangkok: Innomedia, 1988.

³⁸ *Klang* denotes the treasury or warehouse departments.

prevent fraudulent currency transactions, in which case the *chupahya barcalam* shall declare so for the said commander to mete out punishment to the violators and report such incidents to the governor of Filipinas. The Siamese officials appear mindful of regulating economic transactions, as further indicated by the next article of trade.

The fifth deals with currency exchange in general. The pact requires that those trading in the ships exchange their money based on the prevailing exchange rate.³⁹ Sixth, in case 25, 30, 40 or 75 thousand pesos are offered for the service of the kingdom of Siam, the *chupahya barcalam* shall advise the commander of the factory and the governor of Filipinas in order to remit the said amount to the *oficiales de kang*. Seventh, Spanish merchants may buy all and any merchandise except *salpitre*⁴⁰ and ivory, which are intended for the royal *kang*. Necessary permits from the *chupahya barcalam* are required if the Spaniards would need these goods. Eighth, the purchase of cow and buck hide and *calain de ligor*⁴¹ is also prohibited because the king had reserved them to the Dutch. And ninth, ships sailing from Siam to Filipinas and those sailing from Filipinas to Siam are exempted from paying royal dues as a token of friendship and goodwill. Alexandro was clearly very pleased with the articles of trade. In his account, he says, ‘aside from the considerable interest to propagate Christianity in that kingdom and to forge trade ties... the ship-building alone would have meant considerable savings...’ In Filipinas, the cost of constructing a galleon was about 150,000 pesos but in Siam it would cost only about 35,000 pesos because of the cheap wood and labor, not to mention that teakwood could last up to 40 years without careening, says Alexandro.⁴²

The embassy therefore had a most fruitful voyage and a meeting with the king of Siam that responded to both the immediate and long-term objectives of Manila’s colonial government. The ambassador and his entourage were again treated to the most lavish ceremonies to conclude the exchange and bid farewell to the embassy. On the 29th, Alexandro had another meeting with the king whereupon he was presented with another dress coat and a hat with a golden feather, a gesture that bestowed on him the title *grande de primera clase*.⁴³ The next day, 30 July, the ambassador was also informed that he was being allowed to see the grand pagoda, called *samacodan*,⁴⁴ which he says was a favor solely granted to the Christian king.

³⁹ Bustamante, *Breve*, p. 143. Alexandro’s account of the exchange rate is not very clear.

⁴⁰ *Salpitre* or saltpeter is potassium nitrate, a white crystalline salt used for explosives.

⁴¹ *Calain*, or *calaim* (in Portuguese) refers to a tin alloy in Siam and/or Malaya (present-day West / Peninsular Malaysia). Ligor was a port city on the east coast of present-day Peninsular Thailand.

⁴² Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 142-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁴ *Samacodan-sommonnokodom* is a Pali form of Sanskrit *Sramana Gautama*, the ascetic Buddha.

On the same day, in an act that completed the exchange between the two parties, the *barcalam* gave to the ambassador the letters of the Siamese king and his prince brother to Governor Bustamante. The ambassador was also informed that he would be given copies of the articles of trade after these were made. Then two mandarins came to notify the ambassador that the king had set a three-day feast to honor the Spanish king and the governor of Filipinas, which was held from 2nd to 4th August. The king also set their departure for 8th August, on which day he presented his gifts to the Spanish king, the governor and captain general of Filipinas, and the ambassador.⁴⁵ The gifts were as follows: for the governor—a ceramic slab from Japan, pieces of velvet from Europe, pieces of gold and silver fabric, two Persian carpets with six matching small rugs, exquisite taffetas and other cotton and silk materials, and several pieces of *calain de ligor*; for the Spanish king—three elephant tusks, a white female monkey, two falcons and a variety of exotic birds, and a year-old elephant.

More than five months of voyage and stay at the kingdom of Siam, the Spanish ambassador set sail for Manila on August 9 successful not only in achieving the mission's objectives but also in receiving a lavish royal treatment. The most important gift, of course, was 70 *collas* of rice in response to the crisis situation in Manila.

Reflections on Diplomatic Conduct

Alexandro's account reveals not only the nature and conduct of a diplomatic mission but also the personality of the man who ensured its success. First, it is apparent that from the very start he had a clear grasp of the objectives of the mission and the needs of Filipinas such as when he says he received instructions with utmost clarity (*'con una lucidissima'*) when the voyage set sail for Siam⁴⁶ and when he constantly refers in his account to the rice crisis in Filipinas. Second, Alexandro was always conscious of the higher level of representation that he represented, the Spanish Bourbon king and, on the latter's behalf, Governor Bustamante, for which Alexandro went at great lengths—seemingly at any cost or by brinkmanship—to assert before the Siamese officials. The constant assertion of his status dominated his engagements with Siamese officials prior to the audience with the king and was crucial in getting a higher level of response at par with his considered level of representation. Third, he seems to know how to calculate his own moves vis-à-vis the initiatives and responses of the officials from the palace such as when he ultimately accepted the regulation of the Siamese officials

⁴⁵ Bustamante, *Breve*, pp. 170-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

that the artillery of the ships should be unloaded at Bangkok before proceeding to Ayudhya while gaining an exception for the musketry and gunpowder. Here was a man who was both firm and flexible, standing his ground on how his person and how his embassy should be treated in consideration of his royal representation, but adjusting his stance in view of the larger consequence of the results of his mission. Fourth, Alexandro was also a man attentive to the graciousness and courtesies of his hosts and quick to reciprocate with civilities in commensurate measure. For example, after disembarking from the boat that carried him to the royal palace or after mandarins and guards fetched his letter to deliver to the prince, he had coins distributed to the rowers or to the guards. In all instances when he was treated well, he reciprocated with profuse expressions of gratitude including hosting his own feasts for Siamese officials. Fifth, Alexandro appears properly informed of European diplomacy and historical relations with the countries of Southeast Asia and the importance of such knowledge in achieving the goals of his mission, certainly a requisite to an ambassadorial appointment as his. It may be noted that in asserting the kind of reception he saw fit to his stature, he was helped decisively by his knowledge of previous audiences made by fellow Europeans with the Siamese king, which he made known to Siamese officials.⁴⁷ Equipped with such knowledge, he was able to seek more privileges in terms of the reception the embassy should have since he had the advantage of comparing his position with previous European embassies that came to Siam. Overall, here was a young diplomat who was competent in carrying out his duties as ambassador, attentive to the exigencies on the ground, backed up with considerable knowledge, a tough strategist in dealing with his counterparts knowing when to advance and retreat, and to the end always in command of the situation to count his gains.

On the other side, the Siamese king conveyed to the Spanish ambassador the nature of his kingship. Whatever knowledge Alexandra may have had of Siam at that point could have been bluntly subjected to the reality of a sovereign state, which was conscious of its own place in the world and its power. King Thaisa's politico-religious kingship underscored what treatment he required from foreigners. In not too many words, by curtly prescribing long-standing protocol and ritual, Siamese officials outlined to the Spanish envoy the silhouettes of Ayudhya's patriarchal and universal kingship. But being the kingship that embodied Buddhist tenets of tolerance and absorbed a long tradition of diplomatic wisdom, Thaisa was flexible enough to adjust to the position of the Spanish ambassador. He gave way to a royal reception that matched or even exceeded previous accommodations, which previous kings of Siam like Narai had accorded to an 'equal' or a 'superior' state. He also made possible a treaty that fulfilled the Spanish

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

desire for a commercial station in Siam. Ayudhya's diplomatic tradition expressed itself very well in the established state protocols and procedures, including facilities for translation and interpreting in the Siamese court, which Siamese officials required from foreign embassies. Such tradition also revealed itself in how the Siamese king treated the embassy's objectives, even if at certain points in the 1718 engagement the prescribed protocols truly irritated Alexandro.

Epilogue

After Governor Bustamante's untimely demise in 1719, Alexandro was imprisoned in Mexico to serve a sentence for unclear charges, apparently the consequence of the fate of his uncle, who was killed in a friar-instigated uprising after he incurred the ire of colonial officials and the religious when he launched his reforms in the colony. Alexandro however returned to Filipinas, circumventing restrictions of his stay in Mexico. Once again, Alexandro revealed his character and professionalism. Though no longer the head of an embassy and lacking any more connections with the colonial government, which he used to serve under his uncle, he decided to return to Manila to write the Ayudhya king about his fate and that of Governor Bustamante. He informed the king and the prince (*uparat*) of the circumstances that obtained in the colony after the death of his uncle, the governor. He expressed his apologies that whatever agreement they had contracted with his embassy could no longer be realized. Alexandro's apologies were timely. For after his mission and the agreement he forged with Thaisa, a Siamese mission that arrived in Manila to reciprocate the 1718 embassy was ignored and had to return to Siam. Diplomatic exchange between Siam and Filipinas under Spain would never regain the same grandeur it had in 1718. Alexandro's account of that diplomatic encounter in 1718 is a testament to an unparalleled historic moment.

Chronology of Embassy in Siam

2 March—9 August 1718

- March 2** Departs from Manila, sails for Siam.
- April 3** Drops anchor at the Gulf of Siam, near the mouth of Menam River.
- April 4** Drops anchor at Bangkok, receives instructions from the Barcalam.
- April 13** After being sent by Alexandro to Ayudhya, Captain Miguel de Tauregui returns with the reply letter of the Jesuit rector, Rev. Fr. Antonio Suarez. The mandarin Olvantipadi arrives in the afternoon on board the ship of Alexandro with two Portuguese interpreters to inquire about the embassy.

- April 14** Olvantipadi returns to inquire whether Alexandro represents the king or the governor.
- April 19** Olvantipadi returns again to ask the same question; informs Alexandro of the requirement that the embassy must leave its artillery in Bangkok before proceeding to Ayudhya.
- April 26** The mandarin Guanteca arrives and conveys embassy not exempted from the protocols.
- May 2** The mandarin Lomocorat arrives asserting that exemption from leaving the artillery in Bangkok is impossible but they could be allowed to carry their firearms and munitions; Alexandro accepts after some hedging and pressure from his men.
- May 8** Alexandro receives go-signal to go to Ayudhya.
- May 12** Lomocorat briefs Alexandro on preparations for the boat procession to the royal palace, court reception for the embassy, and submission of Governor Bustamante's letter to the king for translation; disagree on issues like removing of hats and shoes (pp. 107-108).
- May 20** Lomocorat returns agreeing to exemptions in the reception as requested by Alexandro; disembarkation in Ayudhya set on the 22nd, when the king would convoke his court.
- May 22** Boat procession to Ayudhya; reception in the royal court; and submission for translation of the governor's letter to the king.
- May 23** Two mandarins inquire about the health of Alexandro and advise him on procedures for the letter to the Siamese prince, set on the 28th
- May 28** Letter to the prince submitted for translation.
- June 10** Lomocorat visits Alexandro to practice with him on ceremonies for royal audience.
- June 13** Revision of reception in consideration of exemptions, which Alexandro requested (p. 112).
- June 18** Agreement on conduct of reception (p. 113).
- June 22** Audience with the king after 81 days of negotiation for the reception
- June 24** Lomocorat informs Alexandro that the king was already aware of the needs of the mission and had dispatched two boats of rice to Manila ahead of their departure.
- June 25** Alexandro holds a feast for the *barcalam* and the prime minister.
- July 28** Comprehensive commercial treaty forged (pp. 117-19).
- July 30** Alexandro informed that he was allowed to see the grand pagoda.
- August 2-4** Feast set by the king for Alexandro's embassy.
- August 8** Alexandro presents gifts to the king.
- August 9** Alexandro sets sail for Manila.