

FIGURE 122 Siamese King Chulalongkorn expresses his gratitude to Ottoman ambassador in Rome for the hospitality shown for prince Damrong during his visit to Istanbul, 1897

7 Documents relating to Siamese Prince Chakrabongse’s visit to Istanbul, 1899

7.1 *Commentary on the Royal Letter from King Chulalongkorn of Siam by Jana Igunma*

7.1.1 Description of the Letter

This rare letter reveals invaluable information about historical contacts between the royal courts of Siam¹⁰ and the Ottoman Empire.

The letter, written on European paper bearing on the front page the printed emblem referred to as the ‘Royal Command’ including the symbol of the House of Chakri, is dated 23 August, 118 Rattanakosinsok era, which corresponds with 23 August 1899. The letter in Thai language and its English translation were

10 Traditionally, the Thai called their kingdoms according to the name of their capitals (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi). Siam was used as the country’s name mainly among Europeans and Chinese, but became the official name in 1856 following the Bowring Treaty. In 1939 the name was officially changed to Thailand.

written by hand. The part in Thai language is in the style of the Royal Scribes' Department whose staff were trained in a particular neat hand that was used to issue royal decrees, orders and chronicles.¹¹

The letter was sent in an envelope addressed both in Thai and English to His Imperial Majesty Abdülhamid II Sultan of Turkey etc. etc. etc. The part in Thai language includes the phrase "our most illustrious brother and friend" instead of the "etc. etc. etc." in the English translation. On the back, the envelope bears the same printed Royal Command emblem that is on the front page of the letter.

The letter begins with the name and title of the sender given as *Somdet Phra Paraminthra Maha Chulalongkorn Phra Chula Chom Klao Chao Krung Sayam thang phai nuea phai tai lae din daen thang lai thi klai khiang Lao Chiang Lao Kao Malayu Kariang l. l. l.*¹² The English translation of the letter gives Somdetch Phra Paramindr Maha Chulalongkorn Phra Chula Chom Klao, King of Siam, both Northern and Southern, and all Dependencies, Laos, Malays, Kareans, etc. - etc. - etc.

Next follows the name and title of the recipient given as *Phra Ratcha Maitri Mayang Somdet Phra Chao Apdul Hamit thi 2 Maha Sultan Krung Toeki phu pen phrada maha mit an prasoet*,¹³ according to the English translation His Imperial Majesty Abdülhamid II Sultan of Turkey, Our Most Illustrious Brother and Friend.

The main section of the letter refers to a previous visit of King Chulalongkorn's elder half-brother, Prince Damrong Rajanubhap to the Sultan of Turkey and to thank the Sultan for hosting the prince and for sending a message of friendship to the Thai king via Prince Damrong. King Chulalongkorn apologises for not paying a visit to the Sultan during his 1897 tour to Europe. Next mentioned is one of King Chulalongkorn's sons, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh, who is said to be on his way to resume his studies in Russia, apparently passing through Constantinople and on this occasion paying a visit to Sultan Hamid Abdul II. It is said that Prince Chakrabongse had been entrusted with the task

¹¹ A similar writing style was used in Royal decrees issued by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), for example four undated decrees which are facsimiles of handwritten originals from around the end of the 19th century (British Library ORB.30/299).

¹² Title in Thai according to the letter: สมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาจุฬาลงกรณ์ พระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้ากรุงสยาม ทั้งฝ่ายเหนือฝ่ายใต้แลดินแดนทั้งหลายที่ใกล้เคียง คือ ลาวเฉียง ลาวขาว มลายู เกี๋ยง ฯลฯ ฯลฯ

¹³ Title in Thai according to the letter: พระราชไมตรีมายังสมเด็จพระเจ้าอัปดุลฮามิด ที่ ๒ มหาสุลต่านกรุงเตกกี ผู้เป็นภราตามหามิตรอันประเสริฐ.

to present to the Sultan the Most Illustrious Order of Maha Chakrakri¹⁴ as a sign of King Chulalongkorn's friendship and gratefulness.

The last part of the letter contains a wisely chosen universally applicable greeting, re-assuring the Sultan that the Thai king remained his good brother and friend. The sign off is followed by the king's seat, Grand Palace, and the date.

7.1.2 Historical Context

The 1890s was a turbulent but also exciting decade for Siam and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). The Franco-Siamese war of 1893 ended with the loss of large territories east of the Mekong to French Indochina.¹⁵ The king realised the pressing urgency of reforms and modernization of Siam in order to remain an independent state in Southeast Asia.

Significant milestones were reached in the modernization of the administration (installation of the Monthon system in 1897 ending the power of all local rulers) and education systems (admission of girls into the general education system in 1897, curriculum for Bangkok and the provinces in 1898), and towards the abolition of slavery (abolition of the Act of Selling a Person into Slavery in 1897). Great efforts were made to reform the military and to establish an efficient transport system. Thus the country's first railway line was completed in 1900.

In 1897, King Chulalongkorn went on a nine-month tour to fourteen European countries in order to seek inspiration for his own modernisation programs. Although the king had travelled abroad previously¹⁶ this was his first trip to Europe, and he was the first Thai king to ever travel there. The royal yacht stopped over in Singapore, Colombo, Aden and then crossed the Suez Canal before arriving in Venice from where the king continued his journey overland. The countries he visited included Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Russia,

¹⁴ Also known as the Most Illustrious Order of the Royal House of Chakri. It was established in 1882 by King Chulalongkorn to commemorate the Bangkok Centennial and as a remembrance of King Rama I, founder of the Chakri Dynasty. The Order has been presented to the direct descendants of King Rama I and their spouses, as well as foreign Heads of State and members of other Royal houses. It was given to Queen Elizabeth II during her state visit to Thailand in 1972.

¹⁵ According to the Franco-Siamese Treaty, signed on October 3, 1893, almost the entirety of the former Lao Kingdom of Lan Sang was incorporated into French Indochina. This was followed by the losses of the Khmer provinces Battambang, Siem Reap and Sisophon to French Indochina in 1907, and the northern Malay states of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis to British Malaya in 1909.

¹⁶ 1871 to Singapore and Java; 1871–2 to Singapore, Melaka, Penang, Burma and India; 1888 and 1890 to the northern Malay states; 1896 to Singapore and Java.

Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal.

In Russia, King Chulalongkorn stayed as the royal guest of the Emperor of Russia, Czar Nicholas II at Peterhof Palace for about one week. The king's close relationship with the Emperor of Russia began when then Czesarevich Nicholas Aleksandrovich visited Siam in 1891. The Thai king had a particular interest in Russia in his attempt to find a model of modern government that best fitted the interests and characteristics of his country. For obvious reasons, he would not have wanted to imitate either the British or the French systems. The Russian empire was an autocracy, with all power resting in the emperor, aided by counsellors, and the emperor being the protector of the orthodox Christian church, legislator and upholder of justice, and supreme commander of the army. Nicholas's grandfather, Alexander II, had used this immense power to initiate important social and economic reforms. He abolished serfdom, reformed the army, education, justice, and promoted nationalism and the cult of the figure of the emperor. He also began the industrialisation of the empire by contracting thousands of German engineers and technicians, raising capital from British and French investors, and importing the latest technology. It is obvious that King Chulalongkorn appreciated the Russian way and gave it consideration in his model for modernisation.¹⁷ The maintenance of a friendly relationship with the Czar was essential in order to benefit from the Russian experiences and to send younger members of the royal family to study in Russia. Thus, the diplomatic relations between Siam and Russia were formalised during King Chulalongkorn's visit to Russia (July 2–10, 1897). In 1898, the Russian Consulate General was opened in Bangkok. The Russian-Siamese Declaration of Jurisdiction, Trade and Navigation was signed in Bangkok on June 23, 1899.

The king's half-brother, Prince Damrong Rajanubhap (1862–1943), had paid a courtesy visit to the Russian Emperor Alexander III who gave him an audience in Livadiya (Crimea) in 1891.¹⁸ On his return to Siam in the following year, Prince Damrong was appointed Minister of Interior where he began implementing his massive reorganisation program of provincial administration. Previously, he had been initiating significant reforms of the educational system as Head of the Department of Public Instruction. He was also known as

¹⁷ Another model for his program was Germany. The king spent about three weeks in Germany during his 1897 tour obtaining information about the German administrative system, the health system, economy and technology.

¹⁸ The mentioning of Prince Damrong in the letter must refer to this trip since the prince is said to have returned to Europe only in 1930, although he had travelled extensively in Siam and neighbouring countries.

the “father of Thai history and archaeology” due to his deep interest and dedication to the areas of education, history, art, anthropology and archaeology.¹⁹

In 1896, a son of the Thai king, Prince Chirapravati, travelled to Russia on occasion of the coronation ceremony of Czar Nicholas II. This was followed by frequent visits of members of the Thai royal family and state officials to Russia.

Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh, another son of King Chulalongkorn, received his education at the Page Corps and General Staff Academy in St. Petersburg after having studied basic Russian in England for 2 years. He stayed in Russia from 1898 for over a decade, and went back to Siam on visits in 1899 and 1903 before he began to serve as a Colonel in the Hussar Regiment. On his return from his 1899 visit to Siam he stopped over at Constantinople to deliver the Most Illustrious Order of Maha Chakrakri to Sultan Abdülhamid II. In 1906, Prince Chakrabongse was married in Constantinople to Yekaterina Desnitskaya, a Russian citizen of Ukrainian descent. The family then frequently travelled between Russia and Siam via Constantinople.

7.1.3 Discussion

The maintenance of a close relationship with Russia played an important role in King Chulalongkorn’s modernisation program. For frequent travels of members of the Thai royal family to Russia – on occasion of state visits as well as study and private trips of Prince Chakrabongse and other young members of the Thai aristocracy studying in Russia – the route via Constantinople and Crimea was the preferred time-saving option as there was a relatively fast rail link from Crimea to St Petersburg via Moscow. It was therefore crucial to nurture a friendly relationship with the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, especially since there had previously been repeated diplomatic problems between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the decades following the Crimean War.²⁰ This explains why the Most Illustrious Order of Maha Chakrakri was given to Sultan Abdülhamid II although King Chulalongkorn did not meet him in person on this occasion.

The English translation of the original letter is accurate, taking into consideration the socio-linguistic and cultural differences, which always leave room for a broader interpretation. However, there are some minor inconsistencies when it comes to the translation of King Chulalongkorn’s title. This is a fine

¹⁹ In remembrance of him being one of the most influential intellectuals of his time the UNESCO included Prince Damrong in its World’s Most Important Persons List in 1962.

²⁰ When Tsesarevich Nicholas visited Siam in 1891, he had to travel via Vienna and Trieste due to diplomatic difficulties with the Ottoman Empire that had closed the Turkish Straits to all war ships according to the London Straits Convention 1841 which prevented Russian war ships from entering the Mediterranean Sea.

example how the power of 'broad interpretation' can be used to deemphasize unpleasant realities. King Chulalongkorn reportedly fell ill and depressive for several months after the cession of Lao territories to France, which also must have affected his titling after 1893.²¹ The Thai language version of the letter states that he was '*Chao Krung Sayam thang fai nuea fai tai lae din daen thang lai thi klai khiang Lao Chiang Lao Kao Malayu Kariang L.L.l'* – the King of Siam, Northern and Southern, and all neighbouring territories, Lao Chiang (referring to the region of Chiang Mai/Northern Thailand²²), Lao Kao (referring to the Lao in Northeastern Thailand/Isan), Malays (referring to Malay communities in Southern Siam), Karens (referring to Karen communities in Eastern Siam²³) etc. etc. etc. Although the original text and the translation do not correspond completely, the English translation is acceptable because, in the broadest sense, it is a simplified description of the king's title which is sufficient if addressed to a person who may not be entirely familiar with all the details of political developments prior to the date the letter was written.

7.2 *Letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899*

[Translation]

Somdet Phra Paramindi Maha Chulalongkorn Phra Chula Chon Klao, King of Siam, both Northern and Southern, and all its Dependencies, Laos, Malays, Kareans etc.-etc.-etc.

To

His Imperial Majesty Abdülhamid II Sultan of Turkey, Our Most Illustrious Brother and Friend,

Greeting!

We have always remembered with pleasure the kind and cordial welcome which your Majesty had extended to Krommun Damrong Rajanubhab, our beloved Brother, and also your Majesty's message of friendship and goodwill conveyed to us by that Prince and having had no favourable opportunity

²¹ According to Wyatt, King Chulalongkorn, '*broken in spirit and health ... withdrew for some months from participation in public affairs*'. (1984: 204). During a visit to India in 1872, King Chulalongkorn had used the title '*King of Siam and Sovereign of Laos and Malay*' (Baker & Pasuk 2005: 63).

²² In 19th century sources, the inhabitants of the Lanna kingdom (Northern Thailand and part of the Shan State) were commonly referred to as Lao due to certain linguistic and cultural similarities with the Lao of Laos at that time.

²³ The border between Tenasserim and Siam had been negotiated in a convention between the Governor-General of India and the King Mongkut (Rama IV) in 1868; however, there were continued border disputes in the areas further north, especially after the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, until demarcation works began in Karenni and Kengtung in 1889 and the border was accepted by Siam in 1892.

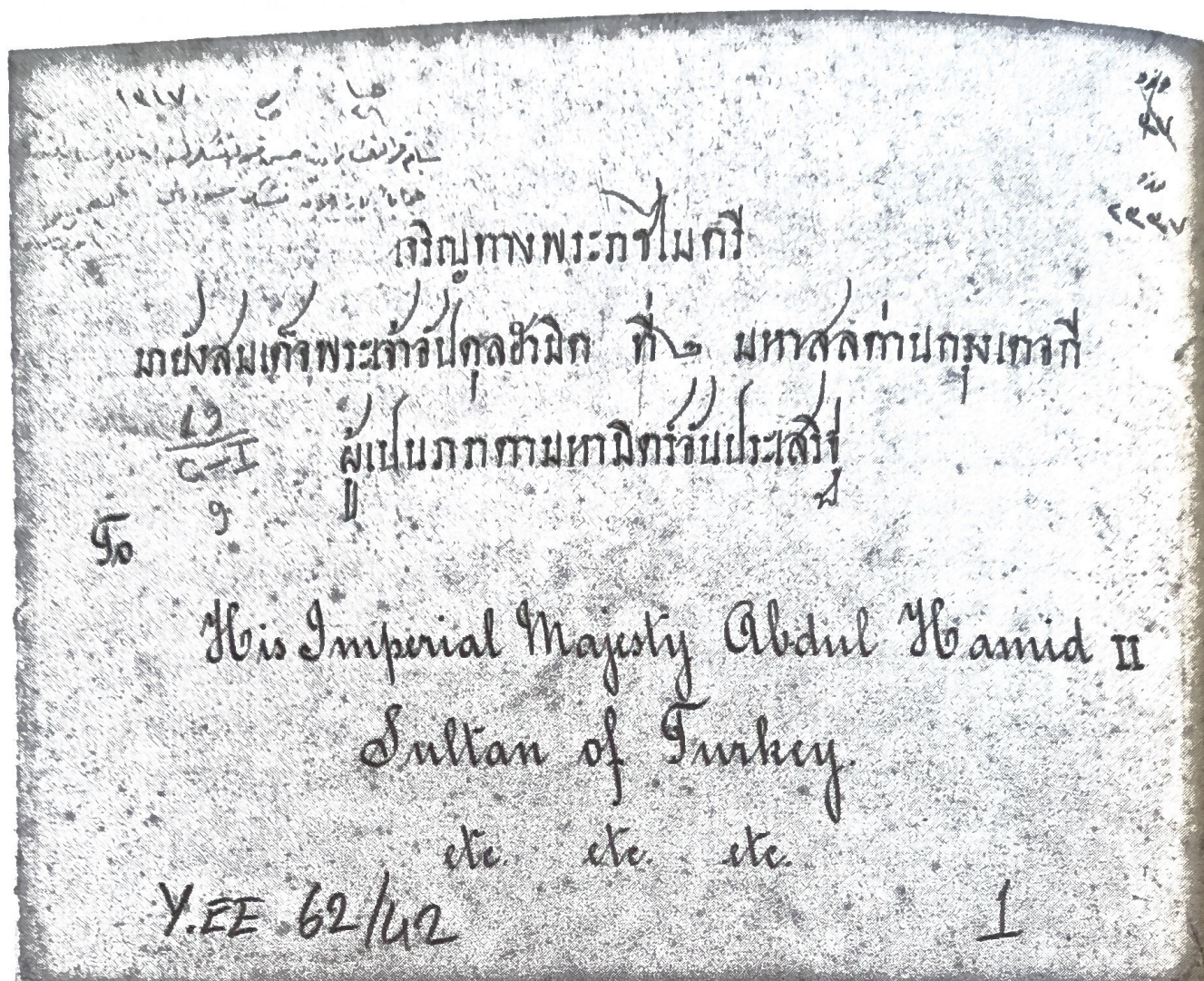


FIGURE 123 Envelope of the letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899



FIGURE 124 Envelope of the letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899

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สมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาจุฬาลงกรณ์ พระจุลจอม
เกล้า เทวกุลสยาม ทั้งฝ่ายเหนือฝ่ายใต้แลคั่นกันทั้ง
หลายที่ใกล้เคียง คือ ลาวเนียง ลาวทาว มลายู
เกรียง ฯลฯ ฯลฯ ฯลฯ

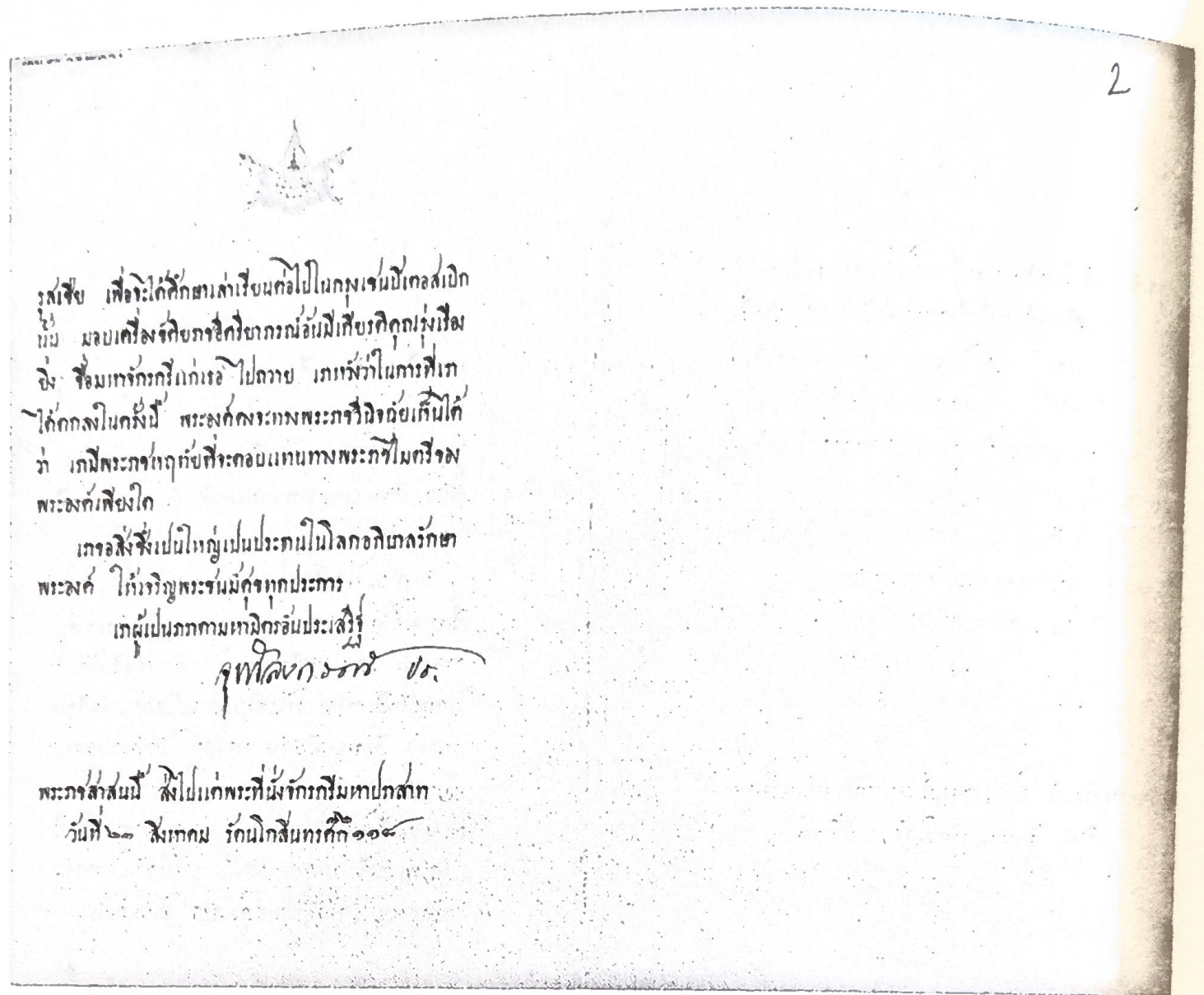
เจริญทางพระราชไมตรีมายังสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว
สยาม ที่ ๒ มหาสุลต่านกรุงเอเธนส์ ผู้เป็นภรรยาตามเทวมิตร
อันประเสริฐ

ข้าพเจ้าได้รลิกอยู่เสมอด้วยกตมอันดี ในการ
ที่พระองค์ได้ทรงพระกรุณาธิคุณ กรณหมื่นตำบพท
ทพ ผู้เป็นพระอนุชาที่รักของเรโดยอาการอันดีนั้นกับทั้ง
ในการรลิกถึงทางพระราชไมตรีแลความปรกตภาอันดีของ
พระองค์ ซึ่งกรณหมื่นตำบพททพ ได้เข้ามาแลศก
ต่อเรานั้น แลเมื่อเรเสด็จประพาศยุโรปเรก็มีได้มีโอกาส
อันสมควรที่จะไปเฝ้าพระองค์ แลเสด็จทางพระราชไมตรี
แลความนับถือของเรต่อพระองค์ เรก็มีได้มีโอกาสอัน
ลุกรักของเร เทพจักรพงษ์ภูวนารถ จะได้กลับไปประเทศ
Y.EE 62/42 2 2 varak (2 shf. boq)

Y.EE.00062

FIGURE 125

Letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899



Y.EE.00062

FIGURE 126 Letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899

during our tour through Europe, to pay a visit to your Majesty and to offer to your Majesty verbally the assurance of our friendship and esteem, we avail ourselves of the return to Russia of our beloved son, Chowfa Chakrabongse Bhuvanart, to resume his studies in St. Petersburg, by entrusting him to deliver to your Majesty the most illustrious order of Maha Chakrakri. We hope that by this determination your Majesty will judge for yourself how much we respond to your Majesty's sentiments.

Praying that the Supreme Power in the universe may grant Your Majesty a happy and prosperous long life.

We are your Majesty's good Brother and Friend.

(Manu Regia) Chulalonkorn. R.

Grand Palace

Bangkok, 23st August 1899

Source: BOA Y.EE. 62/42

Previous publication: Kadi with Peacock 2017: 249–254.

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Translation

Somdetch Phra Paramindr
 Abha Chulalonkorn Phra Chula
 Chom Klao, King of Siam, both Northern
 and Southern, and all its Dependencies,
 Laos, Malays, Kareans. etc - etc - etc.

To:

His Imperial Majesty Abdul Hamid II
 Sultan of Turkey.

Our Most Illustrious Brother and
 Friend,

Greeting!

We have always remembered with
 pleasure the kind and cordial welcome
 which Your Majesty had extended to
 Krommun Damrong Rajanubhab, our
 beloved Brother, and also Your Majesty's
 message of friendship and good-will
 conveyed

Y.EE. 62/42

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FIGURE 127

English translation of the letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan,
 1899

conveyed to us by that Prince and having had no favourable opportunity during our tour through Europe, to pay a visit to your Majesty and to offer to your Majesty verbally the assurance of our friendship and esteem, We avail ourselves of the return to Russia of our beloved son, Choufa Chakrabongse Bhuvanart, to resume his studies in St. Petersburg, by entrusting him to deliver to your Majesty the most Illustrious Order of Maha Chakriakri. We hope that by this determination your Majesty will judge for yourself how much we respond to your Majesty's friendly sentiments. Praying that the Supreme Power

in the

in the Universe may grant your Majesty a happy and prosperous Long Life.

We are

your Majesty's

Good Brother and Friend.

(Hann Regia) Chulalongkorn R.

Grand Palace

Bangkok, 23^d August 1899.

Y.EE.00062

FIGURE 128 English translation of the letter of the King of Siam to Ottoman Sultan, 1899

7.3 Siamese Prince Chakrabongse presents a Siamese medal to Abdülhamid II, 1899

Dâhiliye Mektûbî Kalemi

Teşrîfât-ı Umûmiye Nezâret-i Celîlesi'ne

Zât-ı şevket-simât-ı hazret-i pâdişâhîye haşmetlü Siyâm Kralı Hazretleri tarafından ihdâ ve irsâl kılınan nişânı takdîmine me'mûren Dersa'âdet'e vürûd etmiş olan kral-ı müşârunileyh hazretlerinin mahdûmu fehâmetlü Prens Şakrabonez Hazretlerinin Cumartesi günü merâsim-i mu'tâde ile ve ma'ıyyetleriyle berâber Yıldız Saray-ı şevket ihtivâ-yı hümayûna bi'l-garîme mülâkât-ı seniyye-i mülûkâneye nâ'iliyetiyle nâme-i krâlî ve nişânî takdîm eylemiş ve ba'dehû ikâmetlerine tahsîs buyurulmuş olan merâsim dâ'iresine azîmet eylemiş olduğuna dâ'ir olup Türkçe gazetelerle neşr ve i'lân olunmak üzere tezkire-i husûsiye ile gönderilen pusula usûlü vechile nezâret-i müsteşârî Devletlü Paşa Hazretlerine tebliğ olunarak îcâbı icrâ etdirilmiş ve alınan sûret-i musaddaka leffen sûy-ı âlî-i dâverîlerine tisyâr kılınmışdır ol-bâbda emr u fer mân hazret-i men lehü'l-emrindir.

19 Eylül sene 1315