

# Uma Amizade Duradoura: Over 500 Years of Enduring Friendship<sup>1</sup>

HE Francisco Vaz Patto  
Ambassador of Portugal to the Kingdom of Thailand

**ABSTRACT**—In 1518, Siam and Portugal concluded a pact of friendship and trade. This article, reviewing the enduring relationship between the two countries, is based on a lecture given to celebrate the five hundred year anniversary of this pact.

First of all, let me clarify that I am not a historian, but merely someone very interested in the history of our long, unique and enduring friendship—a friendship that is sometimes forgotten and sometimes exaggerated. Thus, I will be telling this story not as an expert or historical researcher, but simply as an interested observer. I have tried to be as accurate as possible; however, I am sure there will be different interpretations of this period and of the bilateral relations between Portugal and the Kingdom of Thailand (formerly Siam). I hope that I will be able to contribute something positive in order to clarify and reinforce our bilateral relations.

I will start by presenting an overview of the events leading up to the Pact of Friendship and Trade that we commemorated last year. Then, I will try to explore the many ways that the peaceful, long-lasting and enduring relationship between our two nations has impacted both Portuguese and Thai history, commerce and culture until the present day.

## Towards the 1518 Pact

In 1511, Afonso de Albuquerque, Portuguese Viceroy of India, sent Duarte Fernandes to lead the first Portuguese embassy to Siam in the name of D. Manuel I, King of Portugal. This embassy was seeking to establish relations with the neighbouring kingdoms of the newly conquered Malacca, and specifically with Siam and King Ramathibodi II. The King of Siam had heard about the Portuguese, but was surprised by their conquering of Malacca in 1509, as Malacca was understood to be a vassal or tributary state of Siam—even if it was not so in practical terms.

Duarte Fernandes was fluent in Malay (the lingua franca of the region before the Portuguese arrived), as he was for a number of years held prisoner in Malacca. According to some historians, he was received with great satisfaction and honour, and presented to King Ramathibodi II a sword ornamented with jewels as a present from the

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a lecture, delivered at the Siam Society on 31 May 2018, to mark the quincentennial celebration of the 1518 Pact of Friendship and Trade, the first ever pact between Siam and a Western power.

King of Portugal, along with a letter from Viceroy Afonso de Albuquerque suggesting the establishment of diplomatic relations and special trade benefits. The Siamese King responded by sending back with Duarte Fernandes an ambassador with expensive gifts (possibly a ruby ring, a sword and crown, as well as some bracelets with jewels and three small gold boxes). Some historians suggest that the Queen Mother offered some of these gifts herself to the King of Portugal.

Historians say that, with this mission, diplomatic relations were established between Portugal and the Kingdom of Siam, which means that in 2019 we will celebrate 508 years of diplomatic relations.

As described by João de Barros, Joaquim de Campos and John Villiers, a second embassy was sent to Siam in 1511, led by the envoy, António Miranda de Azevedo. This embassy's goal was to start negotiating some sort of agreement, but it was not until 1518 that a mission lead by Duarte Coelho (also as envoy of D. Manuel I, the King of Portugal) was successful in this endeavour. As a result of this mission, according to some sources, both countries agreed on a Pact of Friendship and Trade, making this the first ever established between the Kingdom of Siam and a Western power. This was the formal beginning of what was to become a permanent and extensive Luso-Thai relationship.

There is some debate about the date of this third embassy, led by Duarte Coelho, and the celebration of this Pact. One cause of confusion is that there is no physical document regarding this treaty to be found today in Portugal or Thailand. Some historians argue that this mission took place in 1516. Others even argue that there never was a written treaty. One thing is clear, however, as João de Barros describes in his *Décadas*: there was an agreement or a pact—even if not a treaty—and that was the first pact celebrating friendship and regulating trade between the Kingdom of Siam and the Kingdom of Portugal, even if it was never in written form. This is what we celebrated in 2018. We remembered with joy the 500th anniversary of this Pact of Friendship and Trade, honouring this great historical moment, but also strengthening and invigorating the friendly relations between our two countries. This was an opportunity to launch new alliances, as well as economic and cultural exchanges that contributed to a greater and more profitable cross-cultural collaboration between Portugal and Thailand.

## Negotiating the Pact

According to some historians, Duarte Coelho left Malacca in July 1518 and arrived in Ayuthaya in November the same year. The objective of this mission was threefold: 1) to confirm the peace pact that was discussed by the two previous envoys; 2) to guarantee the Portuguese special commercial privileges and facilities to settle and trade in specific areas of Siam (Ayutthaya, Tenasserim, Mergui, Patani and Nakhon Sri Thammarat) in exchange for Portuguese guns, munitions and cannons; and 3) to guarantee religious freedom for the Portuguese and to send Siamese to settle in Malacca—possibly the Portuguese wanted Siamese to settle in Malacca to replace many Muslim merchants who had left the city after the Portuguese conquest (Campos, 1883).

This pact offered benefits to Siam with respect to the conflicts being waged against

neighbouring kingdoms, especially Chiang Mai. Before this time, the Siamese military did not use rifles or cannons very effectively, even though they were familiar with weapons produced in China. The weapons brought by the Portuguese were of a better quality and the Portuguese taught the Siamese how to use them effectively and even fought at their side. This proved to be a big benefit to the King of Siam.

In return, the pact brought great commercial advantage to the Portuguese. During the subsequent years, approximately 300 Portuguese traders, as well as ship builders, military advisors and mercenaries, settled in Ayutthaya and other parts of the Kingdom of Siam. In 1538, for example, King Chairachathirat put 120 Portuguese into service as mercenaries and military advisors, mostly instructing the Siamese military in musketry.

Trade between Siam and Malacca developed quickly, bringing to Malacca rice, tin, ivory, indigo and timber, such as dyewoods and sappan wood, and bringing to Siam ammunition and cannons, as well as other goods from Portuguese India. While the trade between continental Portugal and Siam was always limited, due mostly to the long distance, the trade between Siam and the Portuguese colonies and trading posts in Asia grew steadily.

In the mid-16th century, Fernão Mendes Pinto, the Portuguese explorer, coined the term “Venice of the East” to describe Ayutthaya, Siam’s capital city. He used the term for the first time in his travelogue, *Peregrinação*, which described his travels in Asia between 1540 and 1550.

## The Portuguese in Siam

In 1566 or 1567, the first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Siam, apparently as chaplains to Portuguese soldiers. These two Dominican priests were killed two years later. In 1584, the first Franciscan priests arrived during the reign of King Naresuan (who reconquered Siam from the Burmese) and built a church in Ayutthaya. The Jesuits arrived in 1607, during the reign of King Ekathotsarot. In 1606, King Ekathotsarot sent an embassy to the Portuguese Viceroy in Goa to renew the bonds of friendship between Siam and Portugal. This mission resulted in the arrival of the first Jesuit, Frei Baltazar de Sequeira, and the creation of the third Portuguese church in Ayutthaya.

By the early 18th century, Ayutthaya’s “Baan Protuget” (the name of the Portuguese neighbourhood) was the Siamese capital’s largest Western community, occupying an area of more than 0.5 square kilometre in size and having an estimated population of 3,000 persons. By this time, the community supported three Roman Catholic parishes—Dominican, Jesuit and Franciscan.

From the time of the initial Pact, a special relationship was formed between Portugal and Siam with a focus on friendship, trade, integration and protection. In Siam, the Portuguese were more interested in trading than conquering. This was perhaps due to the fact that they were busy dealing with many locations in the rest of the world—too many for a small country with less than four million inhabitants in those days, of whom one million were dispersed around the globe. It is also clear that the Portuguese did not have the manpower to create colonies in this region, even if they had so desired. Their tactic, according to Michael Smithies, was to establish a line of small trading posts.

There are stories of Portuguese attempts at colonisation or consolidation of political power, such as Filipe de Brito de Nicote who, at the beginning of the 17th century established some sort of independent kingdom called Syriam in Rakhine/Arakan (in present-day Myanmar) until he was defeated by the King of Ava. This example is the exception and by no means describes the usual Portuguese activity in the region.

Some historians also argue that because Portugal was such a small country trying to develop its presence in this part of the world, the instructions from our kings were to integrate with local communities and create personal relations and blood connections that would help establish a stronger presence in the future. We did follow this pattern in Southeast Asia and it helped us to develop our relations throughout the Kingdom of Siam and build well-integrated Luso-Thai communities, whose descendants can still be found today.

### Later diplomatic relations: the 17th century

Contacts between Portugal and Siam continued throughout the ensuing years, with various embassies and diplomatic missions, trade, military advisory, and so on. Sometimes relations were more intense; sometimes there was a stronger presence, at other times a less visible one; but there was always a presence of Portuguese or Portuguese descendants in the Kingdom. This relationship was, of course, influenced by the strength or weakness of the two parties, which fluctuated over the years.

Even if the Portuguese political, economic and commercial presence in Siam was not always strong, friendship prevailed and the efforts of goodwill between both nations persisted. People to people relations were always perceptible, having cultural and social impacts. Historical developments in Portugal also influenced our bilateral relations. During the period that Portugal was under the control of the Spanish Kings (1580-1640), our official presence in Siam was reduced. Even then, there was always a Portuguese community living in Ayutthaya, mostly composed of Portuguese descendants, as the number arriving from Portugal was reduced. While this community may have had less economic power than before, trade continued as the main activity, although centred in local and regional markets, rather than in long distance ones.

With the arrival of the Dutch in Ayutthaya in the early 17th century, relations with the Portuguese were further complicated, as Spain and Holland were enemies and often at war with one another. This also influenced the role of Portugal at the Siamese court. The arrival of the French also created some difficulties to the position of the Portuguese in Siam, especially during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). After 1640 and liberation from Spain, the Portuguese tried to regain its position in Siam. While relations improved and trade with Portugal increased in the mid-17th century, international competition was now very strong. The Dutch presence in the region was growing quickly, and in 1641, the Dutch even conquered Malacca from the Portuguese. Siam was also now trading with, and influenced by, a growing French presence.

In order to strengthen relations, King D. Pedro II sent an embassy to King Narai in 1684. This mission, led by Pero Vaz de Sequeira, the son of the Portuguese ambassador to Japan, was not very successful in trying to counterbalance the French power

supported by the famous Constantine Falcon (even if he was married to Thao Thong Kip Ma, or Maria Guiomar de Pina, a woman of partly Portuguese origin). France also had the support of the Pope who, due to political issues in Europe, had placed all the Roman Catholic missions and works in Asia under French control, even those founded by Portuguese. Against all these odds, King Narai, who understood the importance of diversifying relations, sent an Embassy to Lisbon that same year. Sadly, however, this embassy never arrived as the boat sank en route to Europe.

### From Ayutthaya to Bangkok

After the reign of King Narai and the death of Constantine Falcon in 1688, the situation seemed to improve and the presence of Portuguese trade increased again in Siam until the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767. During this period, there are reports of courageous actions by the Portuguese in Ayutthaya, such as their bravery during an attack in 1760, when the Burmese made a strong assault from the south-east. The Baan Protuget, located on the river south of the palace, was the first to be affected. According to some descriptions, the settlement offered such strong resistance that the Burmese retreated, although not for long. When they returned in 1767, the Portuguese settlement was surrounded, and even though fought bravely, they were defeated and had to surrender. During the fall of Ayutthaya that followed, the Baan Protuget settlement was destroyed and some Portuguese were taken to Burma as prisoners and hostages.

When King Taksin moved the capital of Siam to Thonburi after 1768, many Portuguese joined the new king. The community was offered a piece of land to settle and to build a church in recognition for their support during the battle with the Burmese. This area was known as Kudicheen and the church was named Santa Cruz. This neighbourhood is still known today as the biggest area of Portuguese descendants in Bangkok.

In the early Bangkok period, during the reign of King Rama I (1782-1809), relations between Siam and European powers were not so strong. This was possibly due to the situation in Siam, but also due to political developments in Europe. Even so, on 28 December 1786, King Rama I sent a letter to Queen Maria of Portugal inviting her to open a trading post in Bangkok. The King offered land to build a Roman Catholic Church and to support a *feitoria*, or trading post, a dock and a shipyard to facilitate Portuguese trade.

During this period, the French revolution and Napoleonic wars were responsible for great instability in Europe and a disruption in contact between Siam and Portugal (as well as Portuguese India and Macau). This was further aggravated by the French invasion of Portugal and the move of the capital from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, followed by the independence of Brazil and the civil war in Portugal, all of which caused great social and political unrest until the middle of the 19th century. Most likely due to the fact that the situation in Portugal was unstable, the Queen of Portugal never responded to the letter from King Rama I.

In Siam, the security situation and economy started to stabilise during the reign of King Rama II, and relations with the West resumed in a more sustainable way—including

with Portugal, Portuguese India and Macau. In 1819, there was an attempt to negotiate a new Friendship and Trade Treaty between Portugal and Siam, but it never materialised, probably due to the unstable situation in Portugal and little interest in Asia. However, these negotiations resulted in a positive outcome: Carlos Manuel da Silveira, the envoy sent from Goa with instructions from King D. João VI of Portugal to negotiate this treaty was, afterwards, nominated as the first Consul General of Portugal to Siam. Through a letter of concession, signed by His Minister Chao Phya Surivon Montri, addressed to the Viceroy of Portuguese India, and dated 9 November 1820, King Rama II offered to the King of Portugal a piece of riverfront land for the construction of a ‘feitoria’ (trading post), consulate and official residence for the Portuguese consul general.

During this period, a new Portuguese neighbourhood also developed in this area. Called Kalawar-Calvário, or Holy Rosary, this area and church community included homes for some of the Portuguese who had earlier moved to Santa Cruz. These people accepted King Rama II’s offer of land on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya river, just adjacent to the Embassy of Portugal. Since then, three Portuguese communities in Bangkok have evolved (although today these would be better described as three Thai Catholic areas of Portuguese descent): Conception was founded during King Narai’s reign, the Church of the Immaculate Conception was built in 1673, and is probably the oldest Catholic church in Bangkok, now with a community of approximately 500-600 members; Santa Cruz was founded in 1768, and now has approximately 1,550 members; Kalawar, or Holy Rosary, was founded around 1772, and nowadays is merged with the Chinese community from Chinatown, making it impossible to calculate the number of Portuguese descendants.

In 1820, Carlos Manuel da Silveira was named as the first permanent Consul General of Portugal to Siam, and he established a trading post and a General Consulate in Bangkok, on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya, the same site where the Embassy of Portugal is still located. This property (which reportedly had earlier been the home of a Vietnamese prince) was also the first stop in Bangkok for several of the other foreign diplomats, who subsequently arrived to establish their own representations. This was most likely the case with the Americans, who established a Baptist mission next to the Portuguese Embassy.

Trade was at that time focused on ships sailing back and forth between Bangkok and Macau (under Portuguese Administration and controlling the presence of Portugal in this part of the world), but it also included trade with Goa (Portuguese India) and the rest of the world.

A new Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Navigation between Portugal and Siam was signed in 1859 with King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851-1868). This treaty included the principle of extraterritoriality for Portuguese citizens, which conferred the right to a trial by a Portuguese consular representative instead of the Siamese courts. This led several Chinese and other Asians to acquire the status of “protected” persons by the Portuguese Consulate, as they tried to escape Siamese law, including trade laws and taxes. The principle of extraterritoriality ended only with a new treaty signed in 1925.

While the residence of Carlos Manuel da Silveira was a structure made of wood and bamboo, the building of the present Residence of the Ambassador of Portugal began in

1860, after a previous failed attempt. The construction took more than a decade to finish due to lack of funds.

### Towards today

Throughout the Bangkok period, relations between Portugal and Siam continued to thrive. Trade continued to be important, but decreased when the extraterritoriality principle was abolished in a new Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Navigation, signed in Lisbon in 1925. Even with less intensive trade, friendly bilateral relations remained strong. Hence, a visit to Portugal was part of the first trip of King Chulalongkorn (King



Photos of the Portuguese Residence by Joaquim Antonio around 1900

Rama V, r. 1868-1910) to Europe in October 1897. He was received by the King of Portugal, D. Carlos I. In 1938, a new Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Navigation was signed, and close relations have continued until the present. In 1960, King Bhumibol (Rama IX, r. 1946-2016) also chose Portugal as one of the stops during his famous, and much celebrated, trip around the world with HM Queen Sirikit. In 2011, in celebration of the quincentenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Portugal and Thailand, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn paid an official visit to Portugal, and offered the nation a Royal Pavilion. This makes Lisbon one of the few cities in the world to enjoy this privilege.

Today, we are very proud to say that the friendship between our two nations has never been interrupted. There has been either a Portuguese Consul or Ambassador in Bangkok continuously since 1820, and several missions have taken place, led first by envoys from the Viceroy of the Portuguese India, and later, by the Governors of Macau, as envoys of the King of Portugal to Siam (Ministers plenipotentiary of Portugal to the courts of China, Japan and Siam). Even when trade declined, the Portuguese presence was always maintained and the lovely spot on the east bank of the Chao Phraya river, which has served as trading post, consulate and embassy, was never closed or abandoned.

### The legacy

This long history explains much of the impressive Portuguese influence that can still be found in several aspects of Thai society today, especially in the language and

the food. There are some Thai words with Portuguese origin, such as: “*sala* from *sala* (living room in Portuguese), *sabu* from *sabão* (soap in Portuguese), and *khanom pang* from *pão* (bread in Portuguese).

From the 16th century onward, Portuguese started to replace Malay as the lingua franca, as some Portuguese learnt Thai (and some Siamese learnt Portuguese). The Dutch, French and Japanese, who arrived later, often knew some Portuguese, and hence that became the language of trade and negotiation with the Siamese. After the capital moved to Thonburi and then Bangkok, Portuguese and the descendants of Portuguese, or Luso-Thai, were used as translators. Many 19th century Thai official documents and treaties used Portuguese as one of the official languages of state, including the first letter sent to the President of the USA in 1818 by Dit Bunnag for King Rama II or the first Treaty of Friendship and Trade that Siam signed with the USA. The Portuguese role as lingua franca declined in the 19th century.

Some Thai desserts and even some savoury Thai dishes have a Portuguese origin. The Portuguese introduced many ingredients into the Thai diet, including potatoes, chillies, maize, tomatoes, peanuts, and even coconut and pineapple. They also shared particular dishes, like stews and curry puffs. Desserts, including *foi thong*, *thong yip* and *thong yot*, sponge cakes, and *khanom farang*, came from the Portuguese, some introduced to Siam by Thao Thong Kip Ma, or Maria Guiomar de Pina (Constantine Falcon's wife), who taught cooks at the Siamese court to make them.

Today, there are still many Thais claiming Portuguese heritage, especially in the three Bangkok neighbourhoods previously discussed, but also in Ayutthaya, Phuket and other parts of the kingdom. Ancestry is sometimes difficult to prove, as the documentary evidence has disappeared. However, there is a renaissance of this interest from some Thai families, looking for their Portuguese ancestors, even if their assimilation has almost been complete.

In conclusion, we have enjoyed 508 years (and counting) of friendship between our countries, dating from the time of Ayutthaya. No other Western nation can rival this. Hence, we decided to celebrate the quincentenary of the first Pact of Friendship and Trade between Portugal and Siam to strengthen the friendly relations between our two countries.