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EARLY ENGLISH
INTERCOURSE WITH BURMA
(1587-1743)

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EARLY
ENGLISH INTERCOURSE
WITH BURMA
(1587-1743)

BY

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PREFACE

To the University of Rangoon for undertaking the publication of this work I owe a deep debt of gratitude. Though one of the youngest universities in the Indian Empire, absorbed in all the manifold problems of early development, and drawing its students from a public that is unable as yet to discriminate between the manufacture of graduates and the promotion of culture, it has from its inception generously aided and stimulated research work in the various fields afforded by the great province it serves.

I am also under great obligations to Professor H. Dodwell of the University of London, with whom I was in constant consultation during the early stages of the work leading up to this volume. He read the manuscript, when it was completed, enriching it with many valuable suggestions.

I gratefully acknowledge help on special points of Burmese history received from my colleagues: Professor Pe Maung Tin, Department of Oriental Studies, University of Rangoon; G. H. Luce, Esq., Reader in Far Eastern History, University of Rangoon, and U Kin Kyi, research student in the

Department of Oriental Studies, University College, Rangoon, and from my friend, G. E. Harvey, Esq., I.C.S., author of "History of Burma from the Earliest Times" (Longmans).

Every student who has had occasion to explore the historical sources at the India Office, has experienced the immense assistance and unfailing courtesy of the staffs of the Library and Record Department.

TAUNGGYI,
SOUTHERN SHAN STATES,
April, 1928.

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APPENDIX I

COINAGE USED BY THE EAST INDIA COMPANY IN ITS TRADE WITH BURMA

THE gold pagoda had been the standard coin of South India under the Empire of Vijayanagar. The origin of the word is obscure. (For full discussion of it see Hobson-Jobson, s. v. Pagoda, Love, "Vestiges of Old Madras," I., p. 192.) After the fall of Vijayanagar at the battle of Talikot in 1564 its pagoda and subsidiary coins, the fanam and cash, still remained the standard currency in the Golconda kingdom and on the Coromandel Coast. This coinage was used by the East India Company's merchants throughout the period covered by this book. The Masulipatam pagoda was worth seven shillings and sixpence sterling in Methwold's early days. "A Pagoda equall in weight and alloy to a Frenche Crowne, and worth there seuen shillings sixpence sterling," he writes of it in Purchas, V (1626 ed.), p. 996. Later on in 1639, when the Company obtained the right to mint coins at Madras, its pagoda was considerably less in weight than the Masulipatam one, which henceforth was known as the "old pagoda" in contradistinction to the "new pagoda" of Madras. Love, in his "Vestiges of Old Madras" (see particularly Vol. I., pp. 192-6), gives the ratio of value between the new pagoda and the old pagoda as 1 is to 1.39. Later in the seventeenth century Bowrey ("The Countries round the Bay of Bengal," 1669-88) gives the old pagoda as worth twelve shillings and the new pagoda as worth eight shillings.

The fanam (Tamil panam, "money") was also a gold coin, but with a considerable amount of alloy in its composition. It bore various values according to the locality in which it was minted. Love gives the following local values:—

In Golconda	the fanam was equal to	$\frac{1}{12}$	of the pagoda.
In Porto Novo	" " "	$\frac{1}{18}$	" "
In Pulicat	" " "	$\frac{1}{24}$	" "
In Madras	" " "	$\frac{1}{36}$	" "

(See also Hobson-Jobson, s. v. Fanam)

The copper cash, a name probably derived from the Tamil *kasu* through the Portuguese corruption *caixa*, was a minutely small coin of very low value, eighty of which went to the fanam.

In Methwold's day the silver rupee had not yet been coined in South India, but large quantities of silver dollars, known as "pieces of eight," "reels of eight," "pieces of 8/8," or "ryalls of eight" were imported. There are many instances of the East India Company's factors using this coin for purposes of calculation in the seventeenth century¹ In 1621 Matthew Duke at Masulipatam, writing home to the Company (O C. No. 983), mentions the pagoda as worth "about 1½ riall of eight, Spanish money." The value of the rial at the time of Forrest and Staveley's embassy to Pegu was about four shillings and sixpence sterling (Foster, "English Factories, 1618-21, p. 158). They therefore took with them to Pegu goods worth about £200 sterling. The total proceeds of the venture, including what was realised of Samuel's estate, amount to barely £193 sterling.

¹ On this point, *vide* Foster, "John Company," Chapter III., wherein he gives an interesting account of the East India Company's early experiment in coining these dollars.

APPENDIX II

NOTE ON THE ALLEGED EXISTENCE OF ENGLISH FACTORIES IN BURMA BEFORE 1647

WRITERS of Burmese history, who have had occasion to deal with the matter of the earliest contact between that country and the East India Company, have one and all asserted the existence of English factories there early in the seventeenth century. Sir George Scott is of opinion that as a result of Anaukpetlun's invitation to the Company, factories were established at Syriam, Ava, and Bhamo in 1619. He proceeds further to say that "these establishments remained in the country, with occasionally a somewhat hectic life."¹ Sir Arthur Phayre² thinks that English factories were probably in existence at these places as early as 1612. He does not specifically connect their foundation with the episode of Thomas Samuel, though he mentions a part of the story. Messrs. J. S. Furnivall and W. S. Morrison, the compilers of the "Burma Gazetteer: Syriam District," state in one part of their volume³ that an agency of the East India Company was founded at Syriam in 1612, while further on⁴ they give the date of the foundation of the English factory there as 1639. The most recent writer on the subject, Mr. G. E. Harvey says⁵: "From about 1627 onwards both the English and Dutch East India Companies had branches in Burma under junior representatives. These branches were closed from time to time, and although profits were occasionally considerable, steady trade was impossible because of the disturbed state of the country. The English were at Syriam, Ava, and Bhamo, the Dutch at Syriam, Pegu, and Ava."

The number of conflicting details contained in these accounts, serve mainly to show in what obscurity the subject is wrapped. It would seem that the chief evidence relied on by these writers is to be found in two vaguely worded passages in Dalrymple's "Oriental Repertory."⁶ The first occurs in Dalrymple's notes written in 1759

¹ Sir George Scott, "Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day," p. 133.

² "History of Burma," p. 273.

³ Furnivall, J. S., and Morrison, W. S., "Burma Gazetteer: Syriam District," Vol. A (Rangoon, 1914), pp. 28-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵ "History of Burma," 1925, p. 191.

⁶ Vol. I., p. 98; Vol. II., p. 345.

on the subject of the expedition to settle the island of Negrais in the year 1753. The passage runs thus : " It may afford you some entertainment to receive a brief Account of several attempts, made, in ancient times, towards an *Establishment* in this *Country*, so far as I have been able to meet with any Records. This Account must necessarily be obscure, from want of complete memoirs . . . In the beginning of the seventeenth century, it appears, both the *English* and *Dutch* had considerable Commerce in the *Buraghmah Dominions*, the *English* had *Establishments* at *Syriam*, at *Prom*, at *Ava*; and on the *borders*, of *China*; probably at *Prammoo* . . . On some dispute with the *Buraghmah Government*, the *Dutch* threatened (if they did not even attempt) to bring in the *Chinese*, this very justly gave umbrage to the *Buraghmah*, who immediately turned both *English* and *Dutch* out of his *Dominions*, many years elapsed before the *English* could obtain leave to return; and the *Dutch* never were re-admitted "

The second passage occurs in a letter of instruction given by Nathaniel Higginson, Governor of Fort St. George, to Edward Fleetwood and James Lesly on the occasion of their mission to Ava in 1695. It runs : " The Right Honourable Company had Factories at *Syriam* and *Ava*, in former years, but withdrew them, the Trade proving *unprofitable*; the terms and priviledges of the Trade then enjoyed, does not appear in any writing, because the *King* never gave any *Phurmaund*, or *Articles* in writing "

Dalrymple gives neither dates nor references in support or explanation of these statements, but it is noteworthy that he does not mention the story of Thomas Samuel, and makes no statement that can be construed into meaning that the earliest English factories in Burma were established by invitation of the king. The records of the East India Company surviving from this period are undoubtedly defective, but had English factories existed in Burma previous to the foundation of the *Syriam* factory in 1647, the contemporary records must have contained some reference to them. Previous to the erection of Fort St. George into a presidency in the year 1652 the Company's stations around the Bay of Bengal and on the Coromandel Coast were subordinate to the chief factory in Java (either *Jakarta* or *Bantam*). The Java papers of the period previous to 1647, whether in the Factory Records series or in the Original Correspondence, contain no reference whatever to English factories in Burma, and, in fact, hardly a single reference to Burma. In addition to this it is significant that in the papers relating to the foundation of the factory at *Syriam* in 1647, no mention is made of previous, or already existing English settlements in the country.

Finally it should be borne in mind that William Methwold, who received Anaukpetlun's offer, did not advise the founding of a factory in Burma. Neither in his letters home from *Masulpatam* nor in his " *Relations of the Kingdome of Golchonda* " is there any mention of such a possible development. Samuel, when a prisoner in *Pegu*,

was allowed to carry on trade. Forrest and Staveley, on their mission to Pegu for the restoration of Samuel's goods, took out piece-goods with them at the Company's charge and traded with them, as has been related, during their stay in the country. But these haphazard operations were in no way connected with the foundation of factories. Possibly it is these proceedings that have misled writers into thinking that factories existed in Burma at so early a date. But it is difficult to understand how anyone could imagine that English factories were founded in Burma as early as the year 1612, when de Brito was still in possession of Syriam !

APPENDIX III

HAMILTON'S ACCOUNT OF THE MERGUI MASSACRE, 1687

THE next place on the continent, to the southward (of Pegu), is Merjee, a town belonging to the King of Siam, situated on the banks of the river of Tanacerin, lying within a great number of small uninhabited islands. The harbour is safe, and the country produces rice, timber for building, tin, elephants, elephants' teeth, and Agala wood¹ In former times a good number of English free merchants were settled at Merjee, and drove a good trade, living under a mild, indulgent Government, but the old East India Company envying their happiness, by an arbitrary command, ordered them to leave their industry, and repair to Fort St. George, to serve them, and threatened the King of Siam with a sea war if he did not deliver those English up, or force them out of his country, and, in anno 1687, sent one Captain Weldon in a small ship, called the *Curtany*, to Merjee with that message. He behaved himself very insolently to the Government and killed some Siamers, without any just cause. One night when Weldon was ashore, the Siamers, thinking to do themselves justice on him, got a company together, designing to seize or kill the aggressor, but Weldon, having notice of their design, made his escape on board his ship, and the Siamers missing him, though very narrowly, vented their rage and revenge on all the English they could find. The poor victims being only guarded by their innocence, did not so much as arm themselves, to withstand the fury of the enraged mob, so that seventy-six were massacred, and hardly twenty escaped on board the *Curtany*; so there was the tragical consequence of one man's insolence.

Before that fatal time, the English were so beloved and favoured at the Court of Siam, that they had places of trust conferred upon them, both in the civil and military branches of the Government. Mr. Samuel White was made Shawbandaar or Custom-master at Merjee and Tanacerin, and Captain Williams was admiral of the King's navy; but the troublesome company, and a great revolution that happened in the state of Siam, made some repair to Fort St. George, others to Bengal, and some to Atcheen (Hamilton, *op. cit.*, in Pinkerton's "Voyages and Travels," VIII., pp. 429-30).

¹ Eagle-wood, an aromatic wood. (*Vide* Hobson-Jobson, s v. Eagle-wood)

APPENDIX IV

NOTE ON THE ALLEGED SETTLEMENT AT NEGRAIS IN 1687

A CURIOUS mistake, which has crept into certain English historical accounts of Burma, is a further reason for the discussion of the Negrais episode of 1686-7, which forms the subject of Chapter VII. It has been asserted that at this time Fort St. George actually established a settlement on the island. Apparently Symes,¹ in the historical memoir with which he prefaces his account of his embassy to Ava in 1795, was the first writer to perpetrate this error. The passage in question runs thus : * " The Island of Negrais was likewise taken possession of by the English, and a survey of it made by one Weldon, in the year 1687. On this island the Government of Fort St. George established a settlement. Little benefit, however, seems to have been derived from the acquisition : the affairs of the India Company, and indeed of the nation, were in too precarious a state in another quarter of Asia, to admit of sparing the supplies of men and money requisite for its effectual support."

This would seem to imply that the attempt to settle Negrais was made after Weltden's expedition. But against this is the indisputable fact that the Records of Fort St. George contain no reference whatever to anything of the kind. After the return of Ambrose Moody's abortive expedition made in October-November, 1686, there is no record of any further attempt to establish a settlement on the island until the year 1753.

The origin of Symes' error is not apparent. As he seems to have had access to Dalrymple's " Letter Concerning the Negrais Expedition " * (of 1753), in which both Moody's and Weltden's expeditions are referred to, but with no suggestion of any settlement resulting from the latter's, it is strange that he should have made the statement referred to above. Dalrymple's account of the expeditions of 1686-7 is as follows : " However there was now (1686) a Resolution taken to settle at *Negrais*, considered at this time as part of the *Arrakan Dominions*, and a Sloop was accordingly sent to make a *Survey* of it ; but losing her Passage, she returned, which prevented the Expedition. . . . In 1687, Captain *Weldon*, with whom *Dampier*

¹ Michael Symes, " An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava sent by the Governor-General of India in the year 1795."

* *Ibid.*, p. 5.

* " Oriental Repertory," I., pp. 97-132.

mentions to have made a voyage to TONQUEEN, went in the *Curlana* to *Mergui*, to declare War against SIAM. In his return he touched at *Negrals*, of which he made a *Survey*; and having destroyed some *Siamese Inscriptions*, and *Hutts*, took possession of the *Island*; hoisted colours, and left an *Inscription*, on *Tin*, of his *Proceedings* " ¹

Too much reliance upon the authority of Symes has led a recent writer to perpetuate his error. Sir George Scott, in his "Burma from the Earliest Times to the Present Day," has the following passage ² "Attempts were made in 1680 and in 1684 to establish factories at Syriam, and in 1686 both Arakan and Burma addressed the Governor of Madras. In the following year, Captain Weldon, 'one Weldon' as Symes calls him, was sent from Madras to Mergui, to declare war on Siam. He does not seem to have got there, but he did descend upon Haing-Gyi, which is the Burmese name for Negrals Island in the Bassein River. He 'destroyed some Siamese huts,' which were certainly not Siamese, whatever else they may have been, surveyed the island and annexed it, and the Government of Fort St. George, which should have known better, planted a settlement there. It did very little, but the memory remained." Evidently the memory of man in this instance is too unreliable to be of much use to the historian, especially when its defects cause the imagination to be drawn upon.

¹ "Oriental Repertory," I., p. 103.

² P. 150.

APPENDIX V

HAMILTON'S DESCRIPTION OF THE " ROUNDAY " IN A BURMESE PROVINCIAL CITY

ALL cities and towns under this King's dominions are like aristocratical commonwealths. The prince or governor seldom sits in council, but appoints his deputy, and twelve councillors and judges, and they sit once in ten days at least, but oftener when business calls them. They convene in a large hall, mounted about three feet high, and double benches round the floor for people to sit or kneel on, and to hear the free debates of council. The hall being built on pillars of wood, is open on all sides, and the judges sit in the middle on mats, and sitting in a ring there is no place of precedence; there are no advocates to plead at the bar, but every one has the privilege to plead his own cause, or send it in writing to be read publicly, and it is determined judicially within the term of three sittings of council; but if any one questions his own eloquence, or knowledge of the laws of equity, he may empower a friend to plead for him, but there are no fees but what the town contributes for the maintenance of that court, which, in their language is called the Rounday, and those contributions are very small. There are clerks set at the back of the judges, ready to write down whatever the complainant and defendant has to say, and the case is determined by the prince and that council, very equitably; for if the least partiality is found awarded to either party, and the King is made acquainted of it by the deputies at court, the whole sentence is revoked, and the whole Board are corrected for it, so that very few have occasion to appeal to court, which they may do if they are aggrieved; and if an appeal is made on ill grounds, the appellant is chastised, which just rigour hinders many tedious suits that arise where there are no penalties affixed to such faults.

The judges have a particular garb of their own. Their hair being permitted to grow long, is tied on the top of their heads with cotton ribbon wrapped about it, and it stands upright in the form of a sharp pyramid. Their coat is of thin betella, so that their skin is easily seen through it. About their loins they have a large lungee or scarf, as all other Peguers have, that reaches to their ankles, and against the navel a round bundle made of their lungee, as big as a child's head, but stockings and shoes are not used in Pegu (Hamilton, *op. cit.*, in Pinkerton, *op. cit.*, VIII., p. 424).

APPENDIX VI

HAMILTON'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ROYAL RECEPTION OF AMBASSADORS AT AVA

THE King's palace at Ava is very large, built of stone, and has four gates for its conveniencies. Ambassadors enter at the east gate, which is called the Golden Gate, because all ambassadors make their way to him by presents. . . .

When an ambassador is admitted to audience in the palace, he is attended by a large troop of guards, with trumpets sounding, and heralds proclaiming the honour the ambassador is about to receive, in going to see the glory of the earth, His Majesty's own sweet face ; the ambassador is attended with the master of the ceremonies, who instructs him to kneel three times in his way thither, and continue so with his hands over his head, till a proclamation is read before he dare rise. Some of his elephants are instructed to fall on their belly when the King passes by them. This relation I had from one Mr. Roger Alison, who had been twice ambassador from the governor of Fort St. George, or his agents at Syman, to the court of Ava (Hamilton, *op. cit.*, in Pinkerton, *op. cit.*, VIII., p. 423).

APPENDIX VII

HAMILTON'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF KING SANÈ'S TITLES

His subjects, if they may be so called, treat him with fulsome adulation. When they speak or write to him they call him their god (or in their language Kiack), and in his letters to foreign princes, he assumes the title of King of Kings, to whom all other Kings ought to be subject, as being near kinsman and friend to all the gods in heaven and on earth, and by their friendship to him all animals are fed and preserved, and the seasons of the year are regularly kept: the sun is his brother, and the moon and stars are his near relations, Lord over the floods and ebbing of the sea; and after all his lofty epithets and hyperboles, he descends to be King of the white elephant, and of twenty-four white somereroes or umbrellae. These two last he may indeed claim with some show of justice, for I have seen elephants of a light yellow both in Pégú and Siam, but who ought to be called their lord is a question not yet decided; and as King of the twenty four somereroes, I believe few Kings will care to dispute that glorious title with him, for those somereroes are only common China umbrellae, covered over with thin Chormandel betelas, and their canes lackered and gilded; and because his own subjects dare not use any such umbrellae, he wisely lays his imperial commands on all other Kings to forbear wearing of them when they go abroad (Hamilton, *op. cit.*, in Pinkerton, *op. cit.*, VIII., pp. 422-3).

APPENDIX VIII

JOHN UNDERWOOD'S ACCOUNT OF THE SYRIAM MURDERS,
1720

(" Madras Public Proceedings," 20th April, 1721)

The Certificate and Declaration of John Underwood

I, JOHN UNDERWOOD, do hereby declare that on the 28th day of October last there were five Europeans and myself went to see the Moors Feast at Syrian in Pegu and when we came into the Moors street, we saw nobody coming near us only—as usual at their Feast—the People were dancing round a Fire. As we were going to their Church, Cap^t. Heron's & Zechary's Lascars came privately into the road way and stopt our Lascars from going to the Church ; and one of Zechary's or Cap^t. Heron's Lascars, having a large Bamboo with a Torch at each end, swung it up and down so that the fire fell amongst the Lascars whereupon they fell to blows, and the Lascars of the *Lusitania* beat them and went to the Church, and when they went they danced and sung as usual at such time, and the whole disturbance seem'd at an end. But presently after, Zechary came on horseback and whip't the people as they passed, and turn'd back again and did the same. The third time riding thro again, he and his horse fell down, and I went to assist him ; but he took me by the Collar, and at the same time an Armenian broke my head. I asked Zechary what he designed to do with me. He made me no answer, but said to his Lascars—in their language—La Mar Banchut, and they knocked me down twice. And after that the third time they knocked me down again, and kept me down till they thought I was dead. Whilst they beat me, I begg'd and desired them to leave of both in the Moors & Portugueeze Languages ; but it was in vain, for they abused me so long that they thought I was dead. And when they thought I was dead, one Man call'd out Basta Basta Churda, and then they began to leave me, but as they passed they struck at me. At last there was no more than two left, who stood by me ; at which time Mr Wankford happening to pass by me and ask'd, Whose that, Underwood ? I told him there was all that was left of me, for I was almost dead. The two Fellows, that stood by me, cry'd out and call'd, Duserer Wollom hy, Duserer Wollom hy. They then collected themselves together & fell beating of Mr. Wankford, he all the time crying out, Mutt Mar, Mutt Mar ; but they did not

regard his entreatys, but continued beating him. At that time Zechary cry'd out, Mar Morter, Mar Morter, and Mr. Wankford was kill'd in half a moment's time. As soon as they had despatched him, the Gunner and Mr. Orme's Steward running along, they left Mr. Wankford, and follow'd Mr. Orme's Gunner and Steward, crying out, La Mar banchute. At that time there was a man came to me & bid me get up. But I told I could not, neither was I able. So he & another carry'd me to the same place where Mr. Wankford lay, which was four or five yards from me, and then they left me. I saw the Gunner the second time come running, being pursued by the Lascars. In the mean while I roll'd myself in Mr. Wankford's blood to make my cloaths bloody. But the Lascars came and felt of my cloaths, to see if I was bloody, and went into the Moon light and looked at their fingers, so that they pass'd me, calling me names At last Zechary's son with six or seven Lascars came to me, holding the point of his creese or dagger close to me, and look'd me in the Face; and calling me many names, he left me. After he was gone, a Portugueeze and one of the Country People carry'd me to Mr. Orme's house. And I do hereby declare what I have here writ is true, and to the truth of which I am ready to swear, Wittness my hand this twentysecond day of December Anno Domini One thousand seven hundred and twenty one.

JOHN UNDERWOOD.

Jurat, coram me
20 April 1721,
Francis Hastings.

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