



HAL
open science

The Golden Letter of King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain (1756)

Jacques P Leider

► **To cite this version:**

Jacques P Leider. The Golden Letter of King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain (1756). 2019. halshs-02324811

HAL Id: halshs-02324811

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02324811>

Submitted on 25 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

The Golden Letter of King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain (1756).
(With Translations into English, French, and German)

by Jacques P. Leider



© Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek – Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek.

The Golden Letter of King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain was inscribed into the Memory of the World Register in 2015. Its inclusion in MoW resulted from a coordinated submission by three countries in two continents, Germany, the United Kingdom and Myanmar, hinting at the exceptional status of this unique epistolary document. The synchronized move to gain recognition of the Golden Letter as a world-class piece of cultural heritage reflects outstanding good-will between institutions from three nations, but first of all the transnational character of the letter itself, the complex historical context of its production and ultimately, as the present article will also try to show, some of the forgotten links between monarchies and trading companies in the 18th century. The author, who was involved with the re-discovery of the letter and its historical evaluation, recalls the historical background, describes the letter and outlines the conditions under which a North German library became its repository over 250 years ago.¹

¹ See in detail J.P. Leider: *King Alaungmintaya's Golden Letter to King George II (7 May 1756). The Story of an Exceptional Manuscript and the Failure of a Diplomatic Overture*. Hannover: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek 2009. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:35-00000303-13>

An unexpected diplomatic initiative of a new Myanmar monarch

In early May 1756, the Myanmar king Alaungphaya sent letters to the East India Company representatives in Myanmar (Cape Negrais) and India (Fort St George, Madras) as well as to the Company's directors in London. A fourth letter, written in Burmese, was sent, together with an English translation, to the British king. It was written on a sheet of pure gold. The golden letter reached King George II in March 1758. About four weeks later, it was forwarded to Germany and registered in the king's private library in Hanover. These few bits of information roughly sketch the transcontinental trajectory of a letter that signified the extraordinary diplomatic initiative of an Asian monarch to reach out to a Western king in the middle of the 18th century. They suffice to raise a flurry of questions about the letter's character, content and the context of its production.

In 1756, Alaungphaya was waging war against the kingdom of Pegu in Lower Myanmar and laying siege to Syriam, the country's most important trading port. He was not entirely sure if he could win the war unless he could avail himself of cannon and ammunition of the same quality which his enemy, the king of Pegu enjoyed thanks to long-standing contacts with foreign traders and notably the French. Who was Alaungphaya? War was raging in Myanmar between a northern (Ava) and a southern kingdom (Pegu) since the south had seceded in 1740. In 1752 Pegu got the upper hand and razed Ava to the ground. However, as soon as the city fell, resistance escalated among the majority people of Myanmar countryfolk who opposed the rule of the mainly Mon people from the south. One leading village headman rose above the others, Aung Zeya, born in Moksobo north of Ava. He took the *nom-de-guerre* Alaungmintaya-phayagyi ("future great king", later shortened by Westerners to "Alaungphaya"), built alliances, successfully led men in battle and reconquered the countryside from the hands of the new rulers and their local allies.

In 1755, his power was firmly entrenched in the area between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers and he turned his sight down south. A series of religious foundations throughout the Irrawaddy valley soon marked the triumphal progress of his armies. Yet conquering the heartlands of Pegu was still another match. The port of Syriam and the capital were heavily fortified; foreign traders, among them both French and English, played a notable role in the trade with Southern India, and cultivated relations with the Pegu king Banyadala. The "new man" from the north was largely unknown and there were no obvious reasons why in 1755 foreign traders would opt for a political rival. Another theatre of political and economic rivalries was the Indian Ocean. Throughout the 1740s, the French and the English East India companies had been heavily competing to carve out a hegemonic position on the seas and along the coasts. From their political point of view, Lower Myanmar ("Pegu") was just one dot on a larger map where the competition was fired by rival political and economic interests, though private traders who were numerous might not get directly involved. From an economic perspective, teak wood was the most important trade item from Pegu and from a security angle, access to

the natural protection offered by ports of the Eastern Bay of Bengal was a strategic asset during the monsoon season. On top of this, just a few years after the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), a new European war broke out in 1756 (“Seven Years’ War”). In terms of the ongoing Franco-British conflict, this war was going to be fought in three continents including Europe, North America and South Asia.

To sum up, it is important to understand how these two war contexts, the North-South political conflict in Myanmar and the Franco-British conflict of East India trade companies overlapped but did not fully tie into each other. The priority of the new king Alaungphaya was to win power over a territory that would allow him to resuscitate the former Myanmar empire of the 16th century. The priority of the English East India Company, on the other hand, was to fight off and humble the French whose influence in India had been on the rise (with the control of fortresses and the building of local alliances with Indian monarchs) and who had built strong relations with the king of Pegu starting from their base in Pondicherry.

Alaungphaya put his bet on the English. It was a bet because in 1755 the East India Company was not yet the regional powerhouse Warren Hastings would create in Bengal during the following years. In 1755, as his troops rapidly advanced south, Alaungphaya had reached out for the first time to the East India Company representatives in Cape Negrais, a settlement created by the EIC at the Western end of the Irrawaddy delta. The reactions were tepid and the outcome (in terms of cannon and munition paid in silver coins) modest. The EIC chief took orders from directors in London and governors in Madras and was not ready to sell lots of cannon - which EIC officers thought the Company might soon need itself - to a local rebel whom they barely knew. Yet Alaungphaya did not give up, because the military situation (notably the siege of Syriam which started in 1755 and lasted until the port’s fall in July 1756) put some urgency on developing his contacts with the English. Alaungphaya was successful building a positive relationship with Henry Brooke, the very young EIC chief in Negrais. Yet what the East India Company wanted on its own behalf was something which the king felt at first not yet ready to deliver, namely a piece of land in Patheingyi (Bassein), a major inland port, where the English wanted to build a stockade and store the teak wood collected from upcountry. A Buddhist pagoda stood on the land and would have to be demolished. Moreover, the English adamantly asked for signing a treaty which would formally exclude, among other stipulations, their French competitors from having access to Myanmar’s ports. In a way, both sides engaged with requests that raised serious concerns for the other side.

To break the deadlock and speed up the process, Alaungphaya had the bold idea to address the British king directly as he wrongly supposed that the East India Company was under his orders. At the same time, he made a clear commitment for the grant of a piece of land in the area where the English wished to raise a settlement. The text of the Golden Letter recalls the good trading relations in the past troubled by the recent war and calls for a mutual commitment of the two kings towards ensuring a bright future for trade relations built on a friendly alliance. Yet while Brooke was a man who displayed a sincere

understanding of the limits of the king's range of action in the context of Syriam's siege in 1755, other officers weren't. Their persistent call for signing a treaty went on, even after the king's four simultaneous letters (to the local chief, the governor in Madras, the directors in London and King George II) were received for dispatch. To cut short the end of the story at this point: by the time King George II received the Golden Letter in March 1758, the political situation was entirely different from what it had been in early 1756. Alaungphaya had won the war, largely without English cannons, he had founded a new dynasty and he kept on further expanding the territory of his kingdom until his death in 1760. He also had signed a treaty with the EIC in 1757, signifying compromise for English legalism despite his disappointment with their apparent disdain for his exquisite letter. However, this was a treaty soon emptied of its promise to improve trade, as the EIC abruptly decided to move out of Myanmar in the same year. As we will see below, Alaungphaya never got a reply from London. The only acknowledgement came from Madras where Governor Pigot gave thanks for the grant of the settlement at Pathein and expressed his "extreme desire ... of cultivating a lasting friendship with your Majesty and establishing such a trade between the English and your subjects as may prove equally advantageous to both".

A piece of art of Myanmar's royal chancellery

The golden letter does not only bear witness to an unprecedented diplomatic offensive, but it is also a remarkable item of Myanmar's material culture during the early modern period. Gold was a noble material reserved for royal and sacred purposes. It is unlikely therefore that pieces such as the golden letter were ever issued in great numbers as they would have been sent to fellow kings who were considered as being of comparable consideration as Myanmar's ruler himself. We know about similar pieces sent by Vietnam and Siam to the emperor of China, but the golden letters sent by Myanmar to China were all melted by order of the Qianlong Emperor in the 1790s.

The royal chancellery oversaw the formulation and the writing of orders and letters. Scribes and secretaries were recruited regarding their special qualifications and level of education for drafting and editing edicts. Heads of the chancellery had to be trustworthy men familiar with matters of procedure, etiquette and protocol. Each order, once drafted and edited, had to go through a process of supervision, verification and approval. The Golden Letter was a special piece of diplomatic correspondence drafted by Letwe Nawratha, a well-known poet, adviser and later biographer of King Alaungphaya.

The measurements of the gold plaque in its present condition are 54.7 x 8.5 cm. The elongated rectangular size of the golden letter was inspired by the stretched-out *boryssa flabellifer* palm leaves (used for the king's standard one- or two-line orders), rolled up and sealed for dispatch and easy conveyance. The golden letter, merely 0.2 mm thick, was similarly rolled up and kept in an ivory casket which has been kept together with the letter. The remarkable fineness of the gold, emphasized by the later chronicler in its textual record of the letter, is confirmed by the spectro-analysis attesting a purity varying between 95 and 98%. The letter bears a *hamsa* seal and is decorated at the left and the

right border of the text with two intricate gold ribbons ending in flanges inserted into the gold sheet and bearing each 12 ruby stones. The egg-shaped rubies originate from Myanmar's famous Mogok mines and are fixed in tiny hexagonal gold settings attached with cramps to the two strips. The weight of the gold plaque including the rubies is 100 g. The *hamsa* or Pegu duck appears as a symbolic animal of the Lower Myanmar monarchies most often associated with the early Mon kingdoms (14th-15th c. CE). In the present case, the *hamsa* seal must be considered a symbol of authenticity of the early Konbaung dynasty, too, keen to claim the legacy of Myanmar's wide-spread empires in the Irrawaddy Valley during the 11th-13th and 16th c. CE. The scribe's comment which accompanies the archival version of one of the other three letters reveals some details about the packaging of the golden letter. The letter rolled up and kept in the ivory cask was put into a sealed "golden" pouch. The pouch was placed in a lacquer box bearing a seal with an English text on a piece of paper. The lacquer box was finally inserted into a satchel bearing a Myanmar seal.

The Golden Letter's recent rediscovery in its German repository

In mid-2006, the present author was contacted by F. Hülsmann, a librarian of the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek in Hanover, requesting expert advice on a gold plate which had been registered in Eduard Bodemann's catalogue of the manuscripts of the Royal Public Library at Hanover (*Die Handschriften der Königlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*, Hannover, 1867) as the letter of "an independent Indian king on the Coromandel coast (of the religion of the *Magi* or *Gebres*) who do not eat anything alive and who adore the fire". In fact, Hülsmann had recently learned that this golden plate was not bearing Indian, but Myanmar script! Practical arrangements were then made and in April 2007, I travelled to Hanover. The extensive titular formula ending with the king's unique name, Alaungmintaya, clearly identified the mysterious gold plate as the original letter sent to the British court in 1756. No one had ever wondered where it had been archived though it was mentioned in Henry Yule's description of Arthur Phayre's mission to the court of Ava in 1855 (*A Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855*. Kuala Lumpur, 1968) while the eighteenth century English translation, written on a sheet of paper and most probably done in Rangoon ("Copy Translation of a Letter from the King of the Burmars to The King of Great Britain") had been found by D.G.E. Hall in the East India archives (now India Office Collections at the British Library) and reproduced in his article "The Tragedy of Negrais," (*Journal of the Burma Research Society*, vol. 21, part 3, 1931). The text itself was therefore not unknown and a faint memory of the original had also lingered on. Here it was revealed in its German repository after a fairy sleep of nearly 250 years. But what was the full story behind it and why had it arrived in Hanover? In agreement with the direction of the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek (GWLb), the State Library of Lower Saxony, we kept the "discovery" a secret for the timing which left me ample time to further study the reign of King Alaungphaya both through Myanmar chronicles and East India Company sources. The most enlightening source to understand the man and his rule were the letters and orders of the king himself transmitted in a set of

edited palm leaf manuscripts. The mythology that built later around this famous hero-king is most visible in Shwebo, his place of birth and first capital. Manuscripts, letters, administrative records and seemingly unrelated documents found at the British Library revealed by bits and pieces the process that had led to the writing of the letter and its odyssey from Rangoon to London via Negrais, Madras and Calcutta. In 2009 the final report on the golden letter was handed over to Georg Ruppelt, the GWLB's director. Yet, circumstances further delayed a public presentation and it was only in January 2011 that the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek revealed the Golden Letter to the Hanoverian public, a magnificent event with hundreds of visitors that raised wide regional and international interest in the media. A presentation on the Golden Letter at the Académie des Sciences et Belles Lettres in Paris followed in 2012. Public presentations on the Golden Letter in Myanmar, Germany and France made translations in different languages a necessity. Translations into English, French, and German, together with a transliteration of the original text have also been joined as an annex to the present essay. Following the MoW nomination in 2015 thankfully initiated by Georg Ruppelt, the GWLB received the UNESCO certificate in March 2017. An exhibition on the Golden Letter, successfully organized by the library, was extended until September 2018.

From Rangoon to Bengal, Madras, London and ... Hanover

For the first time in the history of the country, a Myanmar king had decided to communicate directly with a Western monarch. This singular fact makes the letter into an exceptional document. The East India Company wanted a treaty, but Alaungphaya granted them the favor of what was in his view a better and higher ranking written proof of goodwill to promote beneficial relations with the English traders: a golden letter to their king expressing peaceful intentions and granting the traders what they had requested for a long time. However, ill will and a fateful political context played against the king's optimism. The man who received the king's letters was William Anderson, the East India Company's local doctor who was himself seriously ill when he met the king on 8 May 1756. The next person who received the letters in the Company's settlement in Negrais was a Captain Howe, a military man recently appointed to his position as chief, stubborn, brash, and most likely frustrated that the king had still not signed the latest English treaty proposal. It is possible that after reading the letter addressed to himself in his function as chief, Howe willfully delayed the dispatch of the other three letters to Madras. In fact, nothing happened until Howe died a few months later. Curiously, his successor Thomas Newton sent the remaining three letters onwards to Fort William in Bengal. Only from Calcutta, they were then dispatched to Fort St George in Madras, where they arrived in late March 1757. In late July, the governor of Fort St George, Georges Pigot, sent them on the *Walpole* to London where they were delivered to their addressees in March 1758, nearly two years after they had been written. They were presented during the session of the Court of Directors of the East India Company on 3 March 1758. On the same day, John Payne, the chairman of the Directors, failed to meet the Secretary of State, William Pitt, to hand over the Golden Letter to King George. Therefore, he probably left it at

Hampton Court where the king resided and sent explanations about the situation of the Company in Myanmar only the following day. What either King George or William Pitt learnt or thought about the letter is not known to this day. The king took apparently some interest in it, because he decided to send it to his private library in Hanover where it was registered three weeks later on 28 March 1758. But he did not give any instruction to send an acknowledgment or a reply to Myanmar. As the British king did not reply, the Court of Directors likewise did not draft a letter on their own behalf. Alaungphaya's hope to establish friendship with the British at the highest political level died an early death. In 1758 he was, as we have noted, the uncontested ruler of Myanmar further expanding his territory with his own resources. The bitter feelings he held towards the English traders and the anger their lack of respect for his diplomatic initiative provoked more generally at the court, contributed to a rapid deterioration of relations and ultimately to a break-down of communications which lasted for over thirty years.

We may not blame George II for the diplomatic mishap. He nourished a great affection for Hanover, his birthplace, to where he had returned four times between 1729 and 1741. While sending the letter to his private library, he may have thought about it as a kind of exotic curiosity to be treasured. The political nature of the letter had soon evaporated while even its proper identity and place of origins were lost when the letter was sent to Hanover and confusingly registered as coming from India, as ships were known to come from Madras to London. The Golden Letter escaped the attention of researchers for nearly 250 years. Ironically, a project run by researchers at the neighbouring University of Göttingen, founded by George II, to catalogue Burmese manuscripts in German libraries failed to take notice of the letter until it was awakened to another afterlife in 2007 thanks to the zealous curiosity of a librarian.

His research work on the background history of the Golden Letter led the present author to pursue his investigations on King Alaungphaya's biography and the representations of his life in both Myanmar and Western publications of the 19th and 20th century. A number of the king's orders and letters preserved on palm leaf manuscripts, have been edited in Myanmar compilations of royal orders since the 1960s. However, they have never been extensively used by local or international historians and biographers to revise the king's uniform image as a heroic warrior. This is unfortunate as the king was also a remarkable diplomat as the golden letter and many other letters show. While early Western representations drew a positive image from the accessible information on Alaungphaya, during the late colonial period, his image suffered from the generally negative characterization of the dynasty he had founded by imperialist writers. Further study of these primary sources should contribute to a more critical, but also more balanced description, countering the partial perception of a purely ethno-centric figure. It would also enrich the perception of Alaungphaya as a national figure in Myanmar paying attention to his political action outside the record of conquests and victories. Another direction of fruitful research is the study of the king's religious works involving his pagoda and temple foundations and restorations in association with the contemporary configuration of his *persona* as a man of destiny matching Buddhist cosmological notions.

Dr Jacques P. Leider is a historian of Southeast Asia who has specialized in the study of the early modern and modern history of Myanmar. He has been the head of the research centres of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO, French Institute of Asian Studies) in Yangon and Bangkok since 2017. As the scientific coordinator of CRISEA (Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia, www.crisea.eu), he is at present in charge of an EU-supported project which includes partners in ten European and Southeast Asian countries. - J.P. Leider is a Corresponding Member of the SCEaR.



Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek – Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek.
Source: Wikimedia [copyrighted free use].

Transliteration and translations of the Myanmar letter by Jacques P. Leider

Bhun-tō a-lhvan-krī mrāt-tō-mū lha so Sunāparanta-tuiñ Tampadīpa-tuiñ Kamjoja-tuiñ ca so tuiñ-krī a-poñ-tuiv. nhuik Mran-mā-prañ Rham-prañ Yvan-prañ Kasañ-prañ Taluiñ-prañ rāja-ṭhānī-prañ-krī thīḥ choñ mañ ta-kā-tuiv sakhañ patta // mrā rhve ṇve kreḥ sañ pha-yañ ratanā tvañ myā sakhañ chañ-phrū chañ-nī chañ-kyāḥ cak-krā rhve-lham ra ādicca-vasa ne mañ i achak-anvay achoñ-choñ so rhve-nan rhve-prasad sakhañ Ratanā-pūra-Añva-prañ-krī nhañ. ta-kva Ayujhapūra mañ so Ratanā // singha-kun-bhoñ rhve-prañ-krī kuiv acuiv ra-tō-mū so Aloñ-mañ-tarā-krī khyac-krañ-cvā krā rok ap so jinappattañ Bhañkalā vhat sañ-devī-devī-kat ca so mruiv a-poñ tuiv khrañ rañ lyak Añkarit-mruiv-ma kuiv // a-cuiv ra so Añkarit-mruiv-ma bhurañ bhe-loñ-tō bhuiḥ-loñ-tō tuiv lak-thak mran-mā mañ Añkarit a-chak-chak bhok-kā roñ-vay rok-pok kra rve. a-luiv rhi sa mhya kuiv choñ yū kra ra sañ // Kin-khan a-lyok Taluiñ-tuiñ nhoñ-rhak rā tvañ ta-lap ta-krā ma rok ma pok kra rhi rve. toñ.ta lyak ne sañ nhañ. akrañ-tō nuiñ-ñam-tō cvan-Mō-dhañ-huiñ-krīḥ suiv. akrañ-tō Ankarit mruiv-ma bhurañ ka // Mañ-sa-lī-pa-rut tuiv kuiv ce rve. rok pok lhā rā tvañ mha me-mran rve.krā si ra lhyañ atuiñ thak alvan mañ ekarāj tuiv. vay mruiv. i aṅgā 7 pāḥ tvañ *sakhā* hū so prañ-thoñ-khyañ aṅgā tap sañ phrac khè so arā kuiv // tve. ra pe to. mañ vam-mrok-tō-mū sañ // a-krañ-tō Añkarit mruiv-ma bhu-rañ ka ce sū Mañ-sa-li-pa-rut tuiv ka Pu-sin mruiv tvañ tuik kra sañ-bho svañ thā ne-rā ne rap luiv pā sañ rhi khuiv sañ-tō ū-tañ so kroñ a-krañ-tō Añ // karit mruiv-ma bhu-rañ ka ce rve. lhyok ra sañ phrac sañ a-rhañ khyac-krañ ra mañ kuiv thok rve. kruik rā ne thuiñ ce Pu-sin mruiv tvañ mre-kuiv tuiñ-tā mhat sāḥ rve. Pu-sin mruiv-van tuiv ka khya pe ce sañ // a-krañ-tō Añkarit mruiv-ma bhu-rañ amhūḥ amat Pu-sin mruiv-van // tuiv myak-nhā ñī tañ-chip cā-khyvan-tō pe ap tō mū sañ // prañ-thoñ-khyañ mañ tuiv vay mrāt so achve-khañ mvan koñ tuiv kuiv mhī kra ra sañ phrac mhya ū-sā-bha luiv rhi rā prañ-cum

kra sañ phrac sañ // ñā sā-tō acañ mre-tō achak mrac-tō a-ñvan. akrañ-tō // Añkarit mruiv-
ma bhu-rañ kuiy mre mrac a-cañ rhañ-cvā khyac-krañ kra ra mañ akroñ kuiv sakkarāj 1118
khu ka-chun la-chan 10 rak va-ne. rāja sañ rhve-pe-cā nhañ. khyac-krañ-cvā rok ap so
Añkarit mruiv-ma kuiv acuiv ra so a-krañ-tō Añkarit bhu-rañ

English translation (with annotations)

The most glorious [king], master of all the umbrella-bearing kings in the royal cities of the
Myanma, the Shan,² the Yuan,³ the Manipuri and the Talaing⁴ in the countries of
Sunāparanta,⁵ Tambadīpa⁶ and Kamboja,⁷ lord of ruby, gold, silver, copper, iron, amber and
precious stone mines, lord of the golden palace [with] tiered roofs, descending from the
solar race possessing the golden *cakrā* lance *arindama*, white elephants, red elephants and
elephants of various colours, [I] Alaungmintaya, ruler of the royal city of Ratanāpūra-Ava and
the golden city of Ratanāsingha-Konbhaung⁸ famed as Ayujhāpūra,⁹ convey my kindest
greetings to the English king who rules over the English capital surrounded by such cities as
Chenapattam,¹⁰ Bengal, Fort [St] David¹¹ [and] Devikot.¹²

Under the reigns of my ancestors, the English and the Myanma were trading as much as
they wished. As destiny would have it, due to the troubles in the Talaing country¹³ [trade]
was interrupted for some time. I have learned about your esteemed Highness' wish [to
renew this trade] and the request hereto made by Mr Henry Brooke who was sent by your
esteemed Highness the English King to Mawdin-Haingyi at the farthest point of our
kingdom.¹⁴

I am elated at the prospect of cordial relations which are one of the seven marks of a
fortified city in the possession of great monarchs. Your esteemed Highness has sent Mr
Henry Brooke, your envoy,¹⁵ to make a humble request for a building and a landing place for
your ships which you need in Pathein.

² Exonym for Tai people of eastern Myanmar (Shan country).

³ Tai people of northeast Myanmar and northern Thailand (Lanna).

⁴ Exonym found in Myanmar sources for the Mon people of Lower Myanmar.

⁵ Myanmar on the western side of the Irrawaddy River.

⁶ Myanmar on the eastern side of the Irrawaddy River.

⁷ Classic name of the Shan country in Myanmar sources.

⁸ These are two names of Moksobo, Alaungphaya's native village.

⁹ Literally, "the city that is impregnable".

¹⁰ Madras (Chennai).

¹¹ British fort near Cuddalore, hundred-twenty km south of Madras (Chennai). In 1746, it was the British headquarters for southern India.

¹² Devikot is an ancient city of West Bengal (South Dinajpur). Its appearance in the royal letter is puzzling and seems to reflect a lack of clear knowledge on the presence of the *East India Company* in India.

¹³ "Talaing country" refers to Lower Myanmar (classic name: Hamsavati, in Western sources known since the sixteenth century as Pegu). The sentence hints at the war between Alaungphaya's Myanmar troops and the Mon kingdom of Pegu.

¹⁴ This is the Myanmar designation for Haingyi Island and Cape Nagarit or "Negrais" as it was spelled by the English.

¹⁵ Literally, "sent by your esteemed Highness the English King".

Looking forward to see our cordial relations last for a long time, establish yourself where you like and let the governor of Pathein arrange and take the measurements for a piece of land in Pathein. The royal order [hereto] will be handed over in the common presence of the officers of his esteemed Highness the English king and the governor of Pathein.

Der demütigen Anfrage des Gesandten eurer geschätzten Hoheit, Herrn Henry Brooke, stattgebend und auf dass unsere herzlichen Beziehungen lange währen, haben wir den Landeplatz für eure Schiffe in Pathein dort zugestanden wo er es wollte. Der mit meinem Siegel beurkundete königliche Befehl wird in Anwesenheit der Offiziere des englischen Königs und des Gouverneurs von Pathein überreicht mit dem Auftrag an letzteren das Land in Pathein zu vermessen und zu übergeben.

As great friendship prevails between the rulers of our respective countries, your eager wish has been [hereby] granted.

So that [our] friendship will last until the time of my royal sons, grandsons, great-grandsons and the descendants of the esteemed English king, [I have sent] this royal letter [written] on a sheet of gold on the tenth day of the waxing moon of Kason in the *sakkarāj* year 1118,¹⁶ a Saturday, to your esteemed Highness the English king who rules over the English capital.

French translation

Nous Alaungmintaya, excellent roi grâce à nos mérites exceptionnels, maître de tous les seigneurs au parasol des villes royales des Myanma, des Shans, des Yuan, des Manipuri et des Talaing dans les pays Sunaparanta, Tambadipa et Kamboja, seigneur des mines des rubis, d'or, d'argent, de cuivre, de fer, d'ambre et de pierres précieuses, maître des éléphants blancs, rouges et diverses couleurs, seigneur de la lance *cakra* en or *arindama*, descendant de la lignée du soleil, seigneur du palais d'or, régnant sur la ville de Ratanapura-Ava et la ville d'or de Ratanasingha-Konbaung réputée comme Ayujjhapura, envoyons nos salutations cordiales au roi anglais qui gouverne la capitale anglaise entourée de villes telles Chenapattam, Bengale, Fort St David et Devikot.

Sous le règne de nos prédécesseurs, les Anglais et les Myanma faisaient autant de commerce qu'ils le voulaient. Le destin voulut qu'à la suite des troubles surgies dans le pays des Talaing, le commerce fût interrompu à un moment où votre Excellence envoya Monsieur Henry Brooke à Mawdin-Haingyi pour s'établir aux confins de notre royaume.

Nous l'avons appris après son arrivée et nous nous en réjouissons à la vue de rapports amicaux qui sont une des sept marques d'une ville fortifiée sous le gouvernement d'un roi souverain. Donnant suite à la requête de Monsieur Henry Brooke, l'envoyé de Votre Excellence estimée, nous avons accordé un terrain à Pathein où vos navires pourront s'accoster à l'endroit même qu'il demanda. L'ordre royal certifié par mon sceau a été remis en présence commune des officiers du roi anglais et du gouverneur de Pathein qui a l'ordre de mesurer et remettre le terrain.

¹⁶ 8 May 1756 CE.

Grâce aux bonnes relations qui existent entre nous, rois de nos pays respectifs, Votre souhait a été exaucé.

Afin que notre amitié dure jusqu'aux temps de nos fils, petit-fils, arrière-petit-fils ainsi que les descendants de l'estimable roi anglais, nous avons fait parvenir à Votre Excellence le roi anglais qui règne sur la capitale anglaise, cette lettre royale rédigée sur une feuille d'or le dixième jour de la lune croissante du mois de *kason* de l'an *sakkaraj* 1118, un samedi. »

German translation

Der äußerst verdienstvolle und hervorragende König Alaungmintaya, Herrscher über alle schirmbedeckten Könige in den königlichen Städten der Myanma [Birmanen], der Shan, der Yuan [Nord-Thailänder], der Manipuri und der Talaing [Mon] in den Ländern Sunaparanta, Tambadipa und Kamboza, Herr der Rubin-, Gold-, Silber-, Kupfer-, Eisen-, Bernstein- und Edelsteinminen, [Herr der] weißen, roten und buntgescheckten Elefanten, Besitzer der goldenen *Cakra*-Lanze *arindama*, Abkömmling des Sonnenklans, Herr des vielgebäudigen goldenen Palastes, Herrscher über die königliche Stadt Ratanapura-Ava und die als Ayudschapura berühmte goldene Stadt Ratanasingha-Konbaung, übermittle meine freundlichsten Grüße dem englischen König, der über die von Städten wie Chenapattam, Bengalen, Fort St David und Devikot umgebene englische Hauptstadt herrscht.

Unter der Regierung unserer Vorfahren trieben Engländer und Myanma so viel Handel wie sie wünschten. Der Lauf des Schicksals wollte, dass infolge der Unruhen im Land der Talaing, der Handel unterbrochen wurde, dies zu einer Zeit wo Ihre Königliche Hoheit Herrn Henry Brooke nach Mawdin-Haingyi sandte, um sich am entferntesten Punkt unseres Königreichs niederzulassen.

Wir erfuhren dies nach seiner Ankunft und wir freuen uns darüber mit Hinblick auf ein freundschaftliches Verhältnis, welches eines der sieben Kennzeichen einer befestigten, sich in der Hand eines souveränen Herrschers befindlichen Stadt ist.

Der demütigen Anfrage des Gesandten Eurer geschätzten Hoheit, Herrn Henry Brooke, stattgebend, haben wir den Landeplatz für eure Schiffe in Pathein dort zugestanden, wo er es wollte. Der mit meinem Siegel beurkundete königliche Befehl wurde dem Offizier des englischen Königs zugesandt und der Gouverneur von Pathein wurde beauftragt, das Land in Pathein zu übergeben.

Weil enge Freundschaft zwischen uns, Königen verschiedener Länder, besteht, wurde Ihrem sehnlichen Wunsch stattgegeben.

Auf dass unsere Freundschaft bis in die Zeit unserer Söhne, Enkel und Urenkel wie auch der Nachkommen des geschätzten englischen Königs fort dauert, haben wir diesen auf einem Goldblatt verfassten königlichen Brief am zehnten Tag des aufsteigenden Mondes des Monats *Kason* des *Sakkaraj*-Jahres 1118, einem Samstag, Eurer geschätzten Hoheit, dem englischen König, der über die englische Hauptstadt herrscht, zukommen lassen.