



One of several similar oblique plan-views of Ayutthaya which appear to be based on an original, now lost, dated from the early seventeenth century (possibly commissioned by Joost Schouten, Dutch factor at Ayutthaya in the 1630s) when such portrayals of cities were in vogue in Europe. Source: Original held at the Rijksmuseum (State Museum), Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

FROM AYUTTHAYA TO BANGKOK

Ayutthaya, capital of the Thai kingdom for four hundred and seventeen years. was stormed and taken by the Burmese in 1767 after a siege. maintained for more than a year, despite the seasonal floods of the Chao Phraya river. The siege is graphically described in the Hmannan Yazawindawgyi, the Burmese Annals.

There are two eyewitness accounts of the fall of Ayutthaya. One, in Dutch, is in a two-page handwritten official statement, a proces-verbal, drawn up and signed by the Shabandar, or harbour master, at Batavia on April 26, 1768. The witnesses were an Armenian who was head of the Europeans at Ayutthaya, and a Muslim priest. The Shabandar took the trouble to record the statement officially because it confirmed that the factory or trading post of the V O.C. (Dutch East India Company) at Ayutthaya had been destroyed. A second eyewitness account, in French, is alluded to by Turpin in his history of Siam in which particular notice was given to the overthrow of the Ayutthayan kingdom.

These two accounts differ somewhat in detail, and are different also from that given by Wood in his history of Siam which is based on Thai sources. Each account contains questionable points. All agree, however, that Ayutthaya was reduced to ashes and the population massacred.

Why, having won the city, did the Burmese destroy their prize? It has been suggested that they were 'enraged by the relentless resistance which the T'ais had shown', that they had a 'sacrilegious lust for destruction', and the 'blind rage of ...barbarians'. The Hmannan Yazawindawgyi is dispassionate:

In the midst of their enjoyment in celebration of the conquest...the commander-in-chief...[informed] his officers that news had been received that the Chinese Emperor had sent a vast army...to invade Burma; and that their brother generals and officers at the capital were distinguishing themselves and winning royal favour by successfully repelling the invasion...He added that as they had most successfully accomplished their mission by the capture of the Siamese capital...it behoved them to return as quickly as possible, after demolishing the city, moats, and all defensive and offensive works, as commanded by their Sovereign, so that they might be in time to take part in the fighting against the Chinese and share the honours of war in that field also.

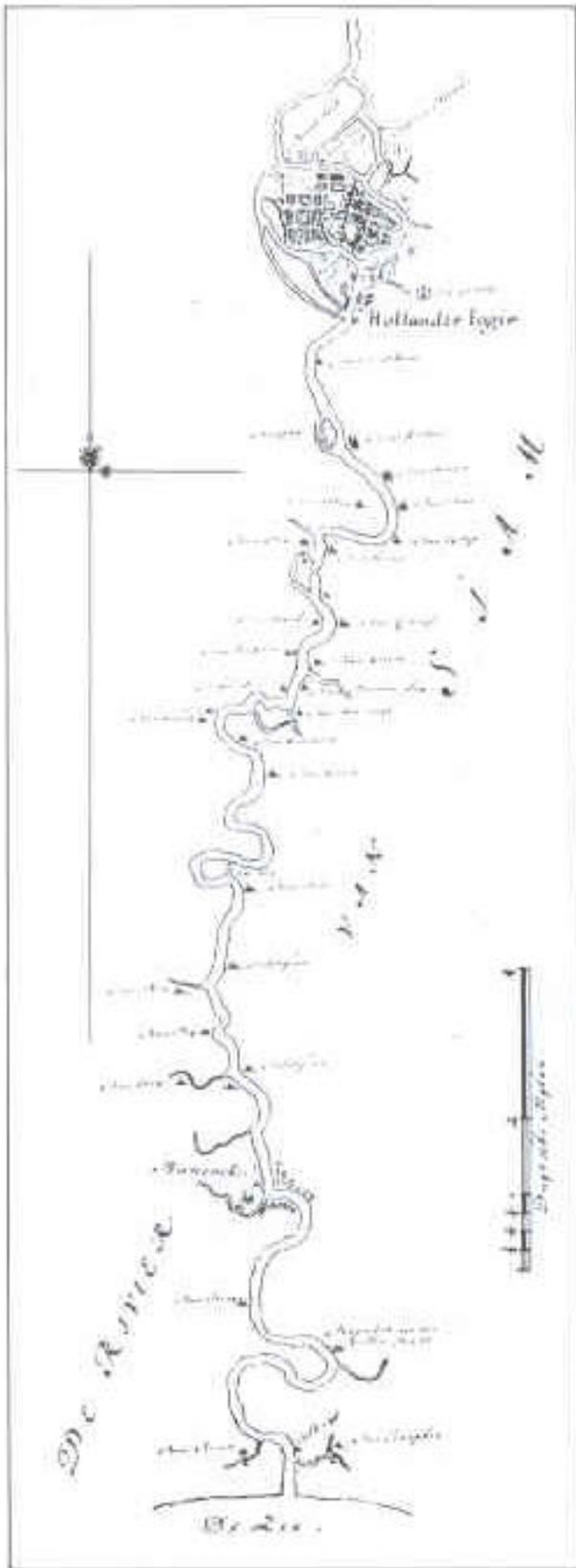
Barely two months later the Burmese army had withdrawn. Only a token force was left behind to secure the countryside.

Within six months of the departure of the Burmese Army, Ayutthaya was 'liberated' by Phya Tak, one of five local 'strongmen' who laid claim to various vaguely delimited parts of the Ayutthayan kingdom on the collapse of central authority. Phya Tak ..

surveyed the ruins..became filled with pity, and meditated the rebuilding of the city, and placing it again upon its former basis...[but] one night he dreamed that the former sovereigns drove him away and would not allow him to remain. Early next morning the king related his dream for the information of his noblemen, and remarked: 'Noticing that the city has become an overgrown waste, it has been my wish to rebuild and resuscitate it, and place it upon its former prosperous footing. As the former owners of the city still jealously cling to it, let us mutually stimulate each other to build up the town Tonaburee [Thon Buri]'. Having made known his dream and his determination, he gave orders to disband the army, gather together the people, the priests, and the descendants of the former royal families that remained. Heading these, he returned and located himself and them in the town Tonaburee...where the king constructed for himself a palace, adequate to the necessity of the times.

According to the Hmannan Yazawindawgyi, 106,100 families were taken from Ayutthaya to Burma. Luang Phraison Salarak contests this figure because even calculating the modest average of three persons to a family, the number...taken away would amount to 318,000 souls'. This is an incredible figure because the Thai version of the fall of Ayutthaya says two hundred thousand Thai lives were lost during the siege, a figure which included those who had died of disease and starvation. Salarak concludes that there could not possibly have been a very large population left in the city'. Further, the Thai Annals admit to only thirty thousand prisoners of war taken off to Burma.

This argument seems reasonable. During the siege, however, the population in the surrounding area, as well as armies raised in other parts of the kingdom, gathered at Ayutthaya. The population of the capital would have been abnormally large. How abnormally large is not known, but since the Hmannan Yazawindawgyi bases its total on the apportioning of prisoners to each Burmese soldier according to rank, it is certain that a considerable number of Thai were at Ayutthaya.



It is probable that most prisoners of war put up valuables in their stead. Consider the problems involved in transporting several hundred thousand half-starved men, women and children from Ayutthaya to Burma; and that the Burmese army wanted to return home as quickly as was possible 'so that they might be in time to take part in the fighting against the Chinese'. The conquerors would have found ransom as attractive as the conquered.

When Phya Tak led 'the people, the priests, and the descendants of the former royal families that remained' to Thon Buri, he may have been at the head of a multitude. Ayutthaya may have been depopulated more by the decision to relocate the capital than by losses suffered from siege and captivity.

The Burmese dismantled the fortifications and may have fired Ayutthaya, but it seems that much remained usable. Substantial building materials – which are in scarce supply on a delta plain – were later loaded on barges and floated down-river to be rebuilt into facsimiles of the Ayutthayan structures from which they had come. Also, much booty must have stayed hidden from the Burmese, since treasure-farming continued on a grand scale for at least fifteen years after the city was razed. A French Catholic missionary in the area at the time goes so far as to credit treasure-farming for the rapid recovery of the economy, remarking that 'the local Chinese...went through the ruins with a fine-toothed comb and recovered uncounted treasures from the debris and interiors of pagodas'.

Perhaps the destruction of Ayutthaya was as much a result of treasure-farming and the wholesale removal of building materials as it was a consequence of the Burmese siege.

Phya Tak is characterised as a 'man of destiny' whose faith in himself was such that he believed that even the forces of nature were under his control'.

Whatever this characterisation owes to the belated bestowing of attributes which might be expected in a worker of miracles', Phya Tak appears to have been well aware of his destiny should he attempt to rebuild and resuscitate' Ayutthaya. Not only would he have to contend with and probably bow to local vested interests – descendants of the royal family and the nobility whom he had antagonised when a general – but at Ayutthaya he was

◀ *Seventeenth century Dutch chart of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital of the kingdom, Ayutthaya; apparently the earliest extant, drawn perhaps in the 1630s. Bangkok town appears on the west bank of the Chao Phraya as Bancoek. Source: Kaart van de rivier van Siam, van de Zee tot aan de Stad Judia' No. 266 in Inventaris der Verzameling Kaarten bernstende in het Rijks-Archief Uitgegeven op last van Zijne Excellentie den Minister van Binnenlandsche Zaken. Eerste Gedeelte. 's Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1867.*

uncomfortably close to the stronghold of a much stronger rival in the person of the Governor of Phitsanulok, who had merely exalted himself in an area already accustomed to his authority.

Phya Tak's 'home' base was some distance from Ayutthaya along the east coast of the Gulf of Thailand, the present provinces of Chon Buri, Rayong and Chanthaburi. This area had not been attacked by the Burmese, and so was able to supply Phya Tak with both the men and materials he needed to overcome his rivals and restore the territorial limits of the Ayutthayan kingdom. Nothing less than the restoration of the kingdom, with himself as king, was the aim of Phya Tak.

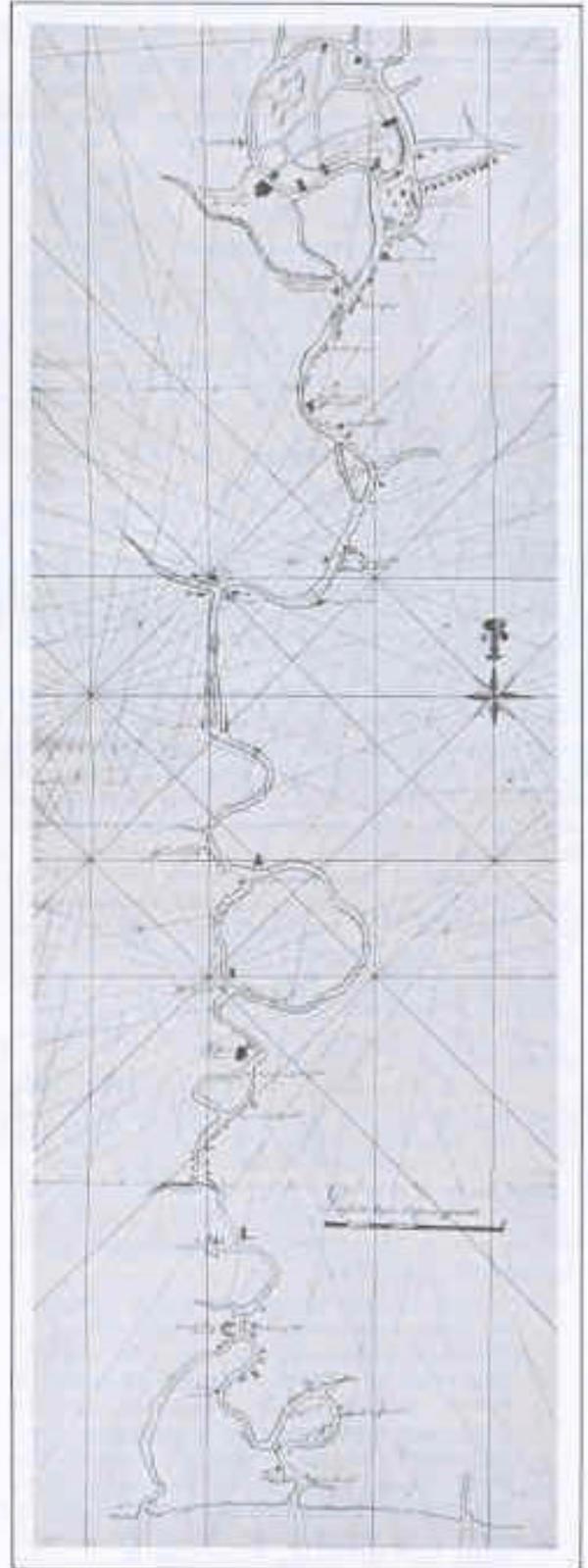
A reason frequently given for the decision to abandon Ayutthaya was the threat of famine. The land around the capital had gone untended during the siege. Relocating the capital did not solve this problem, however, for 'money was poured out without stint to obtain supplies [of rice] from abroad'. In fact, rice was not produced in plenty in the area around the new capital; land immediately east of the Chao Phraya river and directly opposite Thon Buri was drained, levelled and banded for rice growing after Phya Tak assumed the throne, and even then only to assure the supply of this essential foodstuff should the capital be besieged.

Another reason often voiced is that 'to restore Ayutthaya would have cost a great deal of money'. Doubtless, but to build another city on the delta plain would have cost more.

A third reason, closer to the mark, is that the defence of Ayutthaya 'would have needed a large army'. In fact, Phya Tak was interested more in offence than in defence - the liberation of Ayutthaya was an offensive operation, carried out perhaps to establish a just claim to the throne - but he did need a secure stronghold to which he could retire with impunity.

The Burmese were occupied with the Chinese who had invaded their homeland, but Phya Tak had four rivals for the kingship of all or parts of the former kingdom. Each of these rulers had greater resources at his disposal than did Phya Tak. Whatever sanguine hopes motivated Phya Tak, immediate

► *Seventeenth century Dutch chart of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital of the kingdom, Ayutthaya, which represents the course of the river remarkably well, and probably dates from the 1680s/1690s. Bangkok town appears on the west bank of the Chao Phraya as 't oude Casteel Bangkok, directly opposite 't Nieuwe Casteel across the river Source: Kaart van de Rivier van Siam, van de Zee tot aan de Stad Siam ofte Judea' No. 267 in Inventaris der Verzameling Kaarten bernstende in het Rijks-Archief. Uitgegeven op last van Zijne Excellentie den Minister van Binnenlandsche Zaken Eerste Gedeelte 's Gravenhage. Martinus Nijhoff, 1867.*



considerations demanded he retire to the most strategic position available, a defensible command post from which offensives could be directed. The fortress-town of Thon Buri, the strongest post guarding the approach to Ayutthaya by river and the system of canals that linked the Chao Phraya to its main distributaries, was more a prescription than a selection.

Nicolas Gervaise, writing of mid-seventeenth century Thailand, describes 'Bangkok' as 'the most important place in the kingdom of Siam, for it is the only one along all the coast which may offer any resistance to its enemies'. He adds that 'It is protected by walls only on the side facing the river which waters it on the east [my italics] and south'. Thon Buri, not Bangkok, is on the western bank of the Chao Phraya river.

The distinction between the two places is seldom drawn in the literature. Joost Schouten, manager of the Dutch factory at Ayutthaya in the 1630s, describes 'Banckock' as the head of a province and the most important place down-river from Ayutthaya. A Dutch pictomap dated from Schouten's time shows Banckock on the west bank of the river, though the east bank is lined also by important looking buildings.

A fort on the east bank appears to have been built first in the 1660s to the design and under the supervision of Father Thomas, an Italian member of a French Jesuit missionary group which came to Ayutthaya in 1664. Both forts were reconstructed about ten years later by a French engineer seconded to the Crown in 1675.

In 1686 a distinguished French naval officer, the Chevalier de Forbin, was on loan to the Crown for a short time. He modernised the fortifications at Thon Buri and Bangkok and mounted the best European artillery on them as part of a general tightening of defences against the possibility of action by the Dutch to regain their former preminent trading position in the kingdom.

Thai envoys were at the French Court in 1686 to invite French troops to come to the southern Thai town of Songkhla, where they could check the Dutch. The negotiations were successful, and a French force of 636 men and officers under General Desfarges set sail for Thailand in 1687. Two plenipotentiary envoys accompanied the troops, and carried extraordinary instructions:

It is His Majesty's Pleasure that...the King of Siam authorises the appointment of a French Governor at Bangkok, who shall be responsible to himself; also that he admits a French garrison to this town, and permits it to erect fortifications as a protection from the attacks of his neighbours and of the Dutch. Mergui is as vital for the trade of Siam with the Coromandel coast and other parts of India as is Bangkok for that of the Gulf of Siam and the China coast: the Envoys are therefore to request that a French garrison and Governor be posted there.

There is no indication that the Envoys will encounter any difficulty in regard to these demands which they will make on His Siamese Majesty. Moreover, nothing could be worse than to have to apply pressure openly, since it would gravely prejudice the cause of Christianity, and would complicate the task of the trading Company. Nevertheless, if any change should have occurred in the sentiments of the King during the period that has elapsed... and if no hope remains of negotiating with success, in that event His Majesty is determined to force an entry into Bangkok...

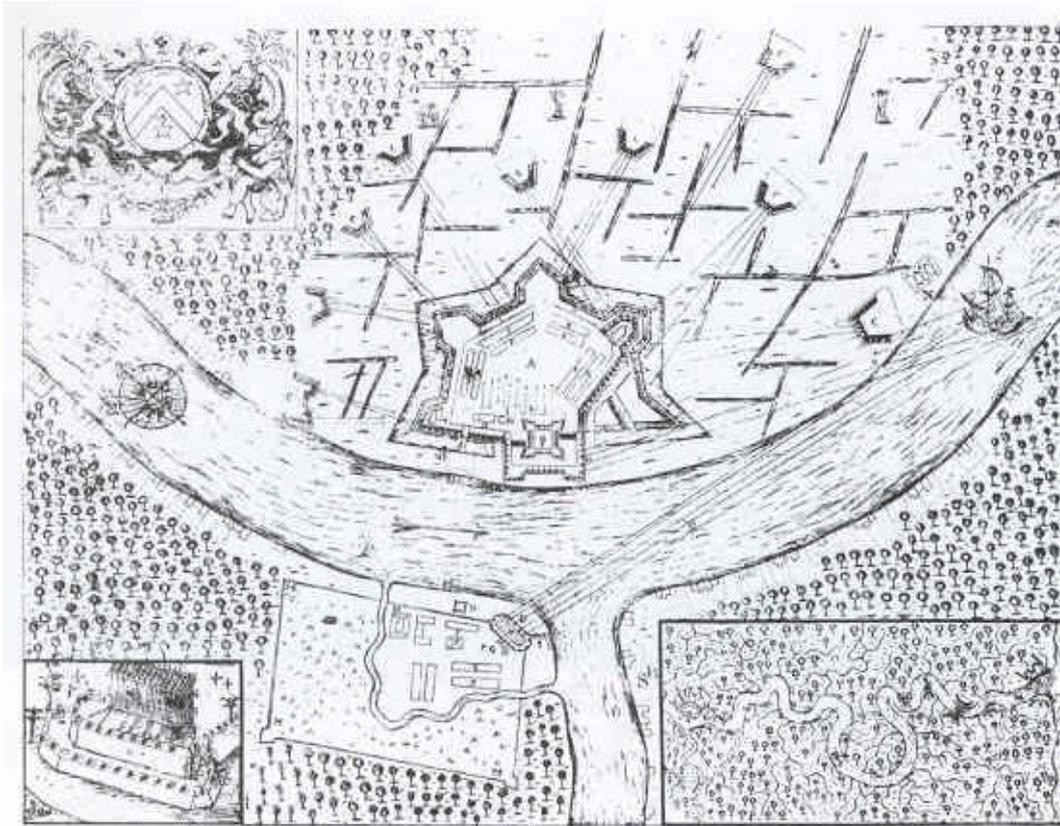
The French were determined to exact the maximum price for their assistance. A foreign garrison at Bangkok could strangle the kingdom. A fiasco ensued and fourteen months after its arrival the French garrison was forced to retire from Siam, leaving behind a feeling of hostility towards France in particular and towards Europeans in general which lasted for more than a century'. In fact, it was not until the ascension of the enlightened King Mongkut (Rama IV) in the mid-nineteenth century that the activities of Western diplomats, traders and missionaries were renewed in earnest. A number of eyewitness accounts of happenings in the kingdom at the time are available.

Events of the years in which we are particularly interested are not well documented, but it may safely be assumed that the condition of the transriver forts at Bangkok had not improved with time. Dr. Engelbert Kaempfer, physician to the Dutch embassy to the Emperor of Japan, passed through the kingdom in 1690 and 'found the old Fort...in good condition; but the new Fort, that had been built by the French on the East shore...quite demolished'.

About thirty years later, Captain Alexander Hamilton described the fort at 'Bangkok' as a regular tetragon that could mount 'about 80 great Guns...but no artillery is in it'.

Despite its deterioration, the fortress of Thon Buri retained strategic pre-eminence in the area. Phya Tak, now King Taksin, set out from Thon Buri first in one direction and then in another and, in a remarkably short time and despite setbacks, overcame his more powerful rivals and restored the territorial limits of the kingdom of Ayutthaya. The kingdom, centred on Thon Buri, was restive but King Taksin sustained his hegemony and repulsed several incursions and full-scale invasions by the Burmese, who had been freed for further adventures by the achievement of peace with China in 1769.

By 1782, however, King Taksin had become incapable of governing, and he was replaced by his ablest general, Chao Phya Chakri General Chakri was crowned King Rama Thibodi, and is known as Rama I or Phra Phuttha Yot Fa Chulalok, the



Diagrammatic evocation of the 'Battle of Bangkok' in 1688 which forced the French from the kingdom. Source: Volent des Verquains, J., Histoire de la Revolution de Siam Arrivee en l'Annee 1688 Lille, 1691.

Explanation of the plan:

- A. The fort where the French were besieged by the Thai
- B. The fort which the French were forced to abandon because they had insufficient men to man both forts. This fort was later occupied by the Thai, though the French had removed all ammunition and had either burst or spiked the cannon
- C. Redoubts of the Thai.
- D. Lines of fire of the French cannon on a Chinese barque belonging to the King. These shots were the first hostile acts of the war.
- E Barracks for the French troops.
- F. Lodging for the French officers.
- G. Magazine for food.
- H. Lodging of the Commandant.
- I. Chapel.
- [J. and K. did not appear on the plan.]
- L. Palisades with cannon which were made so as to sustain the attack or facilitate the retreat of the French.
- M. Old wall of the town
- N. Buddhist monastery.
- O. Court. of Justice of the Governor.
- P. Powder magazine.

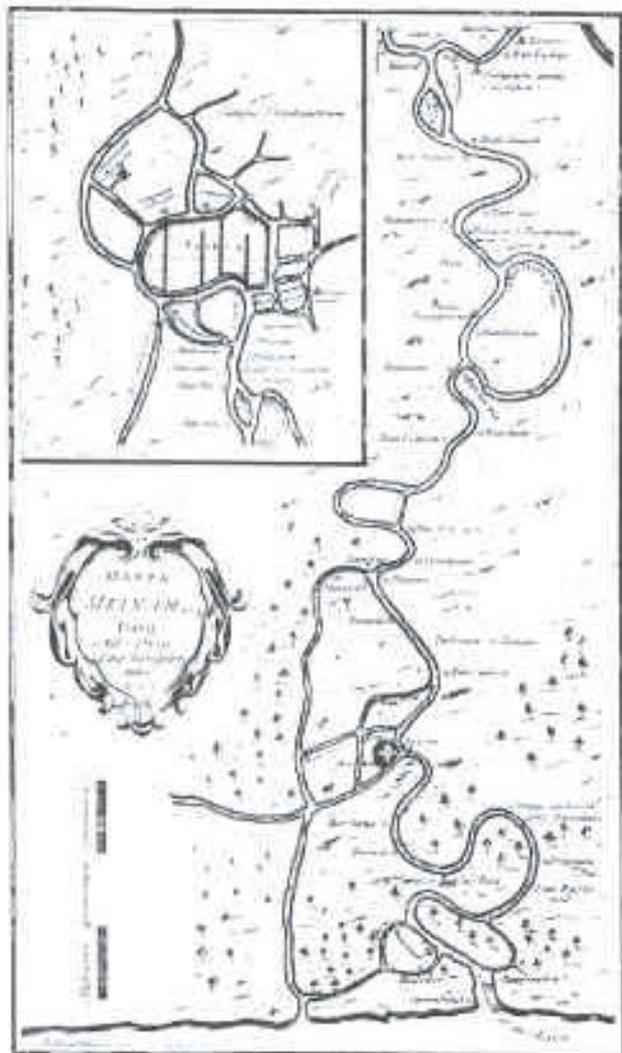
- Q. Emplacement made by the Thai for a cannon firing a ball of 200 pounds.
- R. Wooden tower erected by the Thai so as to be able to better observe the French and to direct their fire.
- S. Map of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to Bangkok.
 1. Mouth of the river.
 2. Batteries erected by the Thai to prevent the French from getting additional aid.
 3. Dutch factory.
 4. Trench with large stakes made by the Thai to prevent any large ships that might bring help to the French from entering the river.
 5. Place where a small ship sent by the French to convey troops elsewhere and to bring back supplies was attacked by many small Thai vessels. The ship was burned by the French to prevent its capture.
 6. House of the Apostolic Missionaries.
 7. Chinese barque depicted on the main map.
 8. Fortress of Bangkok depicted on the main map.
 9. Siege of the fort depicted on the main map.
 10. Canal dug by the Thai so as to service the batteries along the river without having to pass under the French cannon.

founder of the present ruling dynasty.

In Burma, King Bodawpaya had seized the throne a month before the ascension of Rama I. Soon he began to prepare for a grand offensive against the Thai.

Rama I seems to have sought additional security from the Burmese by moving his citadel from the west to the east bank, thereby positioning his strong-hold behind the westward bow of the Chao Phraya river. The river was, in effect, a ready-made moat, a quarter of a kilometre wide and nine fathoms deep; and the bow was easily 'strung' by a canal.

It has been suggested that King Taksin had planned to establish his citadel on the east bank of the Chao Phraya river from the



The critical strategic significance to the kingdom of the stronghold at Bangkok is shown clearly on this late seventeenth century chart, circa 1690, of the Chao Phraya river from its mouth to the capital, Juthia or Ayutthaya. Source: Kaempfer, E., The History of Japan...Together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam Glasgow, 1727;

outset, and that construction or at least the planning for building, had been under way for some time before the move by Rama I.

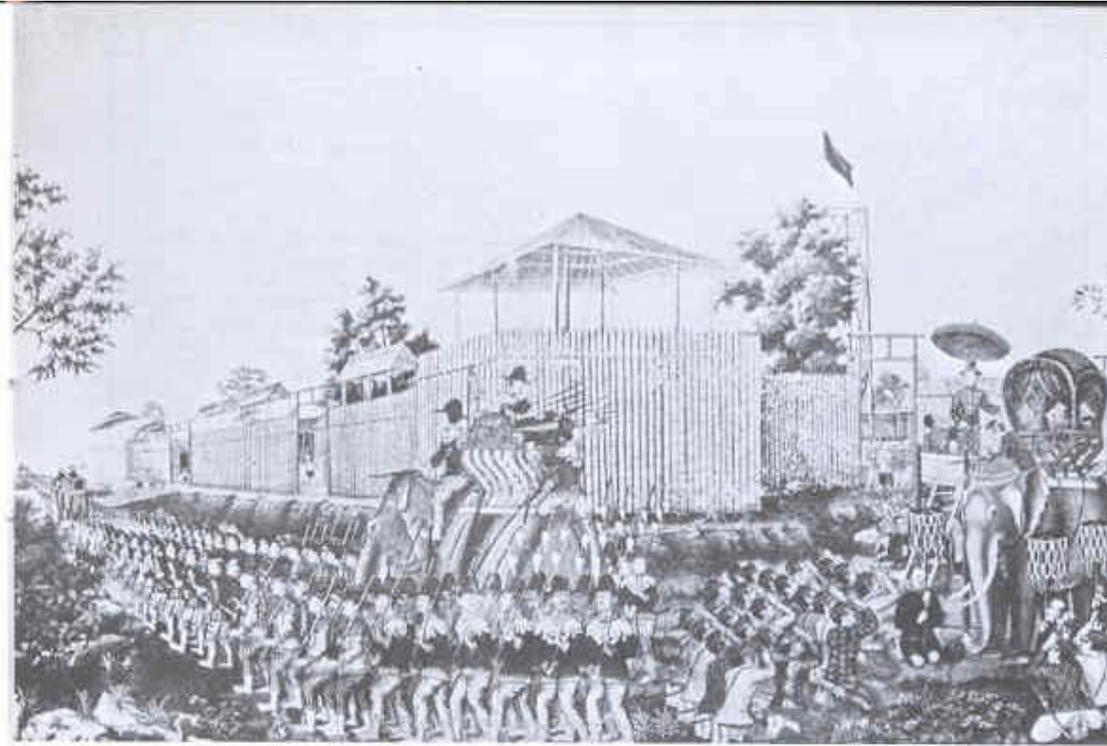
There is not conclusive evidence for this view, but the circumstantial evidence is persuasive. First, east of the river stretched the vast, swampy Sea of Mud' which had to be drained before construction could begin. Second, the site chosen for the new palace was already occupied by a rich Chinese merchant who, together with a considerable community of Chinese, was invited to move to an uninhabited area immediately beyond the walls of the new citadel. Third, King Taksin's 'palace' west of the river seems to have been a temporary residence, as it lay next to two much-frequented monasteries which were adjacent to busy markets - not the remote site which might be anticipated for a royal palace, in view of the nature of the monarchy. Fourth, piles had to be driven into the waterlogged site to support even a paltry building, which the palaces and the residences of the nobility were not. Fifth, Bangkok was planned meticulously in the image of Ayutthaya, the layout of the city and the form of the principal structures being intended to correspond as closely as possible to Ayutthayan prototypes. Sixth, King Tak sin began, but did not complete before his death, the construction of a fortified crescentic moat on the eastern side of the Chao Phraya river. Although this moat, now known as Khlong Lot and yet a feature in the cityscape of Bangkok, has been represented as 'an aid in the defense' of the palace on the west bank of the river, it seems too grand a work for this purpose alone.

All this strongly suggests that much of the groundwork, if not actual construction, had been accomplished, or at least carefully considered, before Rama I announced his intention to establish his citadel east of the river. It has been argued, however, that Rama I, when a General, had urged the transriver relocation of the capital but King Taksin had not been so persuaded.

It might be suggested also that King Taksin had thought to return to Ayutthaya when he had a firm grip on the kingdom but that he later decided, in effect, to move Ayutthaya to Bangkok. Perhaps King Taksin had the prescience to realise that as Ayutthaya was fast becoming inaccessible to overseas shipping another port would have to be developed; since this would, necessarily, dissociate the commercial and political affairs of the State, it could lead to fragmentation of the kingdom or to re-location of the capital in future.

It has been argued that Thailand was neither an exporter nor an importer of any importance before the mid-nineteenth century:

Only luxuries and very valuable and little bulky commodities...were the usual articles of trade at these times, before modern transportation... [enabled] bulky stock to enter...trade with the East As Siam...did not produce to



The return to Thon Buri in 1782 of General Chao Phya Chakri, soon to be king, at the head of a large force which had been warring in Cambodia, as depicted in a painting by a modern Thai artist. Although the scene is posed, the painter has been at pains to represent truly each of the elements in the tableau. The original is in the resplendent collection of paintings at the exquisite Bang-Pa-In Palace.

any considerable amount such [goods] ...the trade...could not become important... [or] profitable.

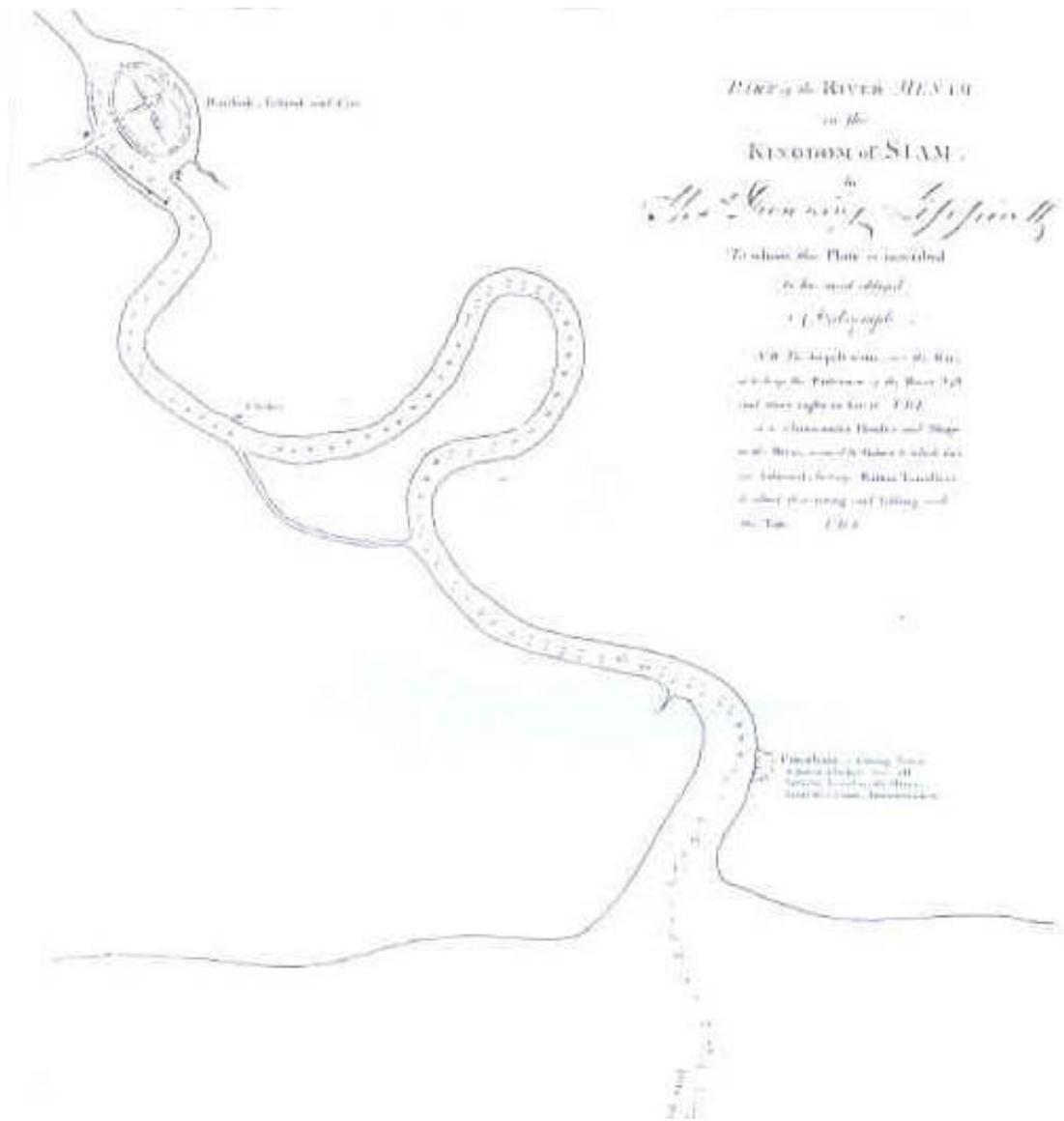
Judged' by European standards of the day, Thai trade before the mid-nineteenth century would seem negligible, but that this trade was of importance in its day is reflected in the number of European and Asian trading houses at Ayutthaya.

Joost Schouten enthuses that 'in the chief City [Ayutthaya] the trading is very good', and he lists a number of exotic exports. 'They drive a great trade with all eating provisions, especially Rice, many thousand Tuns being transported yearly by Forraigners'. It appears, then, that 'bulky stock' entered Thai trade before the advent of modern means of transport. 'The King himself..hath his own Ships and Factours trading to Choromandel and China... he likewise trafficks to Pegu, Ava, Jongonna, Langjang and other places'.

Even when a flourishing centre, however, Ayutthaya was difficult to reach. In addition to the extensive mud flats and the bar across the mouth of the Chao Phraya river, which denied entry to ships drawing more than four and a half metres of water, and the tortuous fairway of the meandering river, the water became shallow a little way above Bangkok, and ships drawing three and a half metres of water were 'scarce able to mount to the City of India [Ayutthaya], where they [were] sometimes forced to stay till...September, October, and November, for water to return'.

To a mid-nineteenth century observer, familiar with the ships of his day, 'The water of the Menam [Chao Phraya river] off Yuthia [Ayutthaya]...[was] a great deal shallower than...at Bangkok, and only vessels of a small tonnage could ever have been able to reach [it]'.

The river itself at Bangkok was once merely a short canal cut across the narrow neck of a wide westward meander bow of the Chao Phraya early in the reign of King Prajai (1534-1546) as part of a grand scheme to improve navigation on the river and to shorten the distance from the Gulf to his capital, Ayutthaya, for merchantmen. The Chao Phraya, however, poured through the by pass canal which rapidly widened and deepened, and soon accommodated the whole of the flow, though even today the river here is narrower than it is immediately upstream. The former meander of the river is traced at present by the narrow, shallow waterways Khlong Bangkok Noi and Khlong Bangkok Yai. A Thai tale tells of a sea cook who had prepared a pot of rice while his ship was sailing along this meander only to find at the end of the bend that he had left his ladle at its beginning. Unperturbed, he removed the pot from the stove, disembarked, strode across the neck of the meander, recovered his ladle, walked back to his ship, reboarded, and served the rice piping hot! Less apocryphal, perhaps, is the observation that natives commonly spent the whole of a day rowing round the meander and then strolled back across its narrow neck to retrieve their



This 'map', though a caricature and indistinct, merits attention because it was published in 1797 and may be the first of the new capital, Bangkok. Source Chart 999(A2) held by Hydrographer of the Navy, Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom.

rice pots, purposefully left behind, and returned still with ample time in which to cook their supper.

'Bangkok' may, in fact, date from the reign of King Prajai (1534-1546) when a string of small fortress-towns was established along the river to guard the more important waterways leading from the Chao Phraya across the delta south of Ayutthaya; however, the founding of a town, named Muang Thon Buri Si Maha Samut, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya is ascribed to 1563, during the reign of King Chakkapat (1549-1565).

The origin of the name 'Bangkok' has proved a conundrum which has attracted the attention of not a few masterminds. Most agree that 'Bangkok', or some near-sounding variant, was used in common parlance by the Thai, and was subsequently taken up and perpetuated – though spelled variously, even quaintly – by foreigners. King Mongkut (Rama IV of Siam, 1851-1868) thought 'Bangkok' referred to

An area around a creek which ran through the spur within the meander of the Chao Phraya which was left high, if not altogether dry, when the river shifted into the man-made channel cut across its narrow neck; 'Bang' is Thai for creek or canal, and 'kok' appears to be an abbreviated form of 'Makok' which is the Thai name for a kind of olive tree which once grew in profusion here. Indeed, Wat Arun, the monastery distinguished by a lofty, eighty-two metre high tower which now dominates the skyline of the city on the west bank of the Chao Phraya, was known as Wat Makok when Ayutthaya was the capital of the kingdom. Foreigners were inclined to read Ban' – the Thai for 'village' – for 'Bang', and so to translate Bangkok' as the 'village of olives'. Several linguists reckon 'Bangkok' was first pronounced by the Portuguese early in the 17th century in an attempt to voice the Thai sound. Most intriguing,

however, is the suggestion by a Thai savant that Bangkok' comes from the Malay word for river bend'; and that the name, descriptive of the former infamous meander of the Chao Phraya, was bestowed on the area by Malays who resided here in considerable numbers at the time.

Whatever the real origin of the informal name Bangkok', Rama I formally named the capital at his coronation ceremony in 1782, viz., Krung Thep Pra-Maha-Nakorn, Boworn-Thawarawadi-Sri - Yudhya, Maha-Dilokpop, Noparatana-Radhani, Burirom, Udom-Pra-Rajnivet-Mahasatan. Four years later, in 1786, the capital was renamed, viz., Krung Thep Pra-Maha-Nakorn, Boworn-Ratanakosindra, Mahin-dra - Yudhya, Maha-Dilokpop, Noparatana-Radhani, Burirom, Udom-Rajnivet-Mahasatan, Amorn-Pimarn-Avatarn-Satit, Sakkatuttiya-Vishnukarm-Prasit. (If the deletion of the reference to Thawarawadi or Dvaravati as a former capital of the realm in the formal title of the new capital as bestowed in 1786 came from a wholesome uncertainty about its existence or its location, there is now no reason to doubt the reality of this pre Ayutthayan kingdom. Might not the bicentenary of Bangkok provide the occasion on which to restore Thawarawadi to its rightful place in the honorific title of the Thai capital?) Later, Rama IV (1851-1868) altered Boworn-Ratanakosin-dra to Amorn Ratanakosindra. Translated (idiosyncratically, perhaps) the formal name of Bangkok reads: The City of Gods, The Great City, The Residence of The Emerald Buddha, The Impregnable City (of Ayutthaya) of God Indr, The Grand Capital of The World Endowed With Nine Precious Gems, The Happy City Abounding in Enormous Royal Palaces Which Resemble The Heavenly Abode Wherein Dwell The Reincarnated Gods, A City Given by Indr and Built by Vishnukarm.

The four years between the first and the final' naming of the new capital was spent in laying the lineaments of the city. Given the large force of labour at the King's disposal (much of which was recruited' from Cambodia and Laos) it may be argued that four years was an adequate period for the raising of the city; that nothing need have been prepared previously by King Taksin; that, indeed, King Taksin had not intended to establish the capital on the east bank of the Chao Phraya.

The royal palaces and the great houses of the paramount dignitaries were built of wood at first and, though inhabited very soon after the move across the river, construction continued on these and other buildings for at least three years. Bricks were brought downriver from Ayutthaya and across the river from Thon Buri for use in the fortifications and, later, the principal structures.

It seems that the fortifications at Thon Buri were partially dismantled because Rama I, when a general, had experienced the difficulties involved in defending a city built on both sides of a river.

Work continued on essential structures throughout the reign, which ended in 1809. Canals were dug



The Dusit Maha Prasat Palace, commonly regarded as the finest building in the Grand Palace and the paragon of modern Siamese architecture. Built by King Rama I (1782-1806) for ceremonial purposes and used on occasion for coronations and royal lyings-in-state, the structure encloses a single chamber and is in the form of a blunt cross, each wing of which is topped by a five-tiered roof, the whole being centred and capped by an exquisite nine-tiered spire. This fine engraving circa 1855 appears to be the first realistic portrayal of this celebrated structure. Source: Bowring, Sir J., The Kingdom and People of Siam London, 1857.

around and through the city, both for defence and for drainage. The walls of the city and the citadel were constructed and fortified and were constantly being strengthened. A large number of important and imposing monasteries were constructed and consecrated.

Seventy-five years after the founding of the new capital, it was remarked that 'The general outlines of the old city (Ayutthaya) so closely resemble those of Bangkok, that the map of the one might easily be mistaken for the representation of the other'.

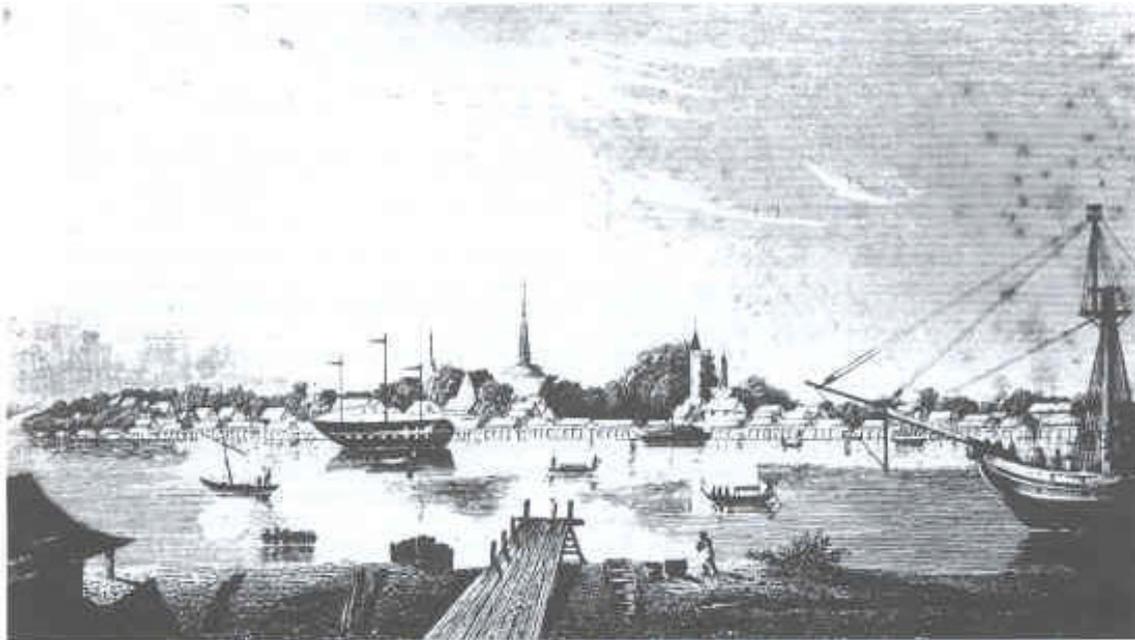
The honours, of course, belong to Ayutthaya, the rubble of which was embedded in the palaces, monasteries and fortifications of Bangkok which were built in the likeness and carried the names of their splendid prototypes.

Rama I did not wish to create a wholly new city but to recreate Ayutthaya, to reproduce the form of the old capital as an essential part of his wish to restore the whole of the Ayutthayan way of life.



Source: Crawford, J., Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China London, 1828.

First views of Bangkok. Based on drawings made during an embassy from the Governor-General of India in 1821-22, these engravings depict the Port and the Grand Palace from the west bank of the Chao Phraya river. Although the scene is stylised and decidedly Westernized, a reasonable impression of the cityscape is conveyed provided the air of order and calm is discounted or, better, replaced with disorder and stir.



Source: Finlayson, G., The Mission to Siam, and Hue the capital of Cochin China, in the Years 1821-2 London, 1826.