

SECTION III

HISTORY



ROBERT CHALLE AND SIAM

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Until 1931, when Augustin-Thierry edited (and mutilated) two long-forgotten works of Robert Challe, the writer was virtually unknown. Since then, slowly, the veil of oblivion has been lifted and extravagant claims are being made for this late seventeenth/early eighteenth century author, who has become something of a cult figure in certain circles. For Challe, apart from writing lucidly and often amusingly, was a person in advance of his time. He was a supreme sceptic, a deist long before Voltaire; he was the first authentic writer in French dealing with the sea, an author of realistic novellas, and his life was as packed with incident and reversal of fortune as a picaresque novel. But he is still virtually unknown outside French reading circles; this article seeks to introduce readers of English to him and deals with only one aspect of his work—his indirect association with Siam as revealed in his *Journal d'un Voyage fait aux Indes Orientales 1690–1691*.

Robert Challe was born on 17 August 1659¹, the son of Jean Challe, a bourgeois of Paris, who had married Simone Raymond in 1650. Robert's father had previously married Simone Robert, who had died in 1647 and this first marriage produced one daughter who became a nun in Compiègne. His second marriage resulted in several children who survived the rigours of youth of the time; the eldest, Jean-Pierre, became a receiver of tallage in the province of La Marche; the second son, André, died about 1681; Robert was the third son and there were two younger daughters. The family seems to have been comfortably off; the inventory of goods made at Jean Challe's death includes pictures, tapestries and silver tableware.

The future writer was made a boarder at the Collège de la Marche, where he met the Marquis de Seignelay, some six or seven years older than he, and who, on his succession to his father, Colbert, as Secretary of State and later Minister for the Navy, was to be a protector of Robert Challe until Seignelay's death in 1690 at the age of thirty-nine. The literary studies at the college were impressive: Challe learnt his Ovid, the ecclesiastical Fathers, Montaigne, Rabelais, Brantôme, Molière, Racine and Corneille there. He also studied philosophy for two years and, while still young, took the first two minor orders for entering the priesthood, which vocation he was expected to espouse like the youngest males in families of the time. But he had already decided, when seventeen or eighteen, not to pursue a career in the church and started studying fortifications. In the

war with Holland, he became a volunteer and took part in the campaign in Flanders.

The war ended with the peace of Nijmegen in 1678, and Challe was placed as clerk in the office of the lawyer Monicauld, who was well known and particularly interested in overseas trade. Challe may have studied law in Paris; he styled himself barrister (*avocat*) in the papers arising from his father's death in 1681. At the end of that year, he had to leave Paris because of "a bad affair," the details of which are unknown. Deloffre and Menemencioglu think it was possibly in relation to a dispute with his eldest brother over the inheritance. Given Challe's choleric temper and readiness to put his hand on his sword, it may well have been a dispute, not necessarily with his brother, leading to a duel. Whatever it was, he went with Bergier, a merchant from La Rochelle, to Amsterdam to buy a boat, and in 1682 also explored the fish marketing possibilities in Montreal, Canada. In 1683, a proper expedition was mounted to Arcadia, that is, French Canada, establishing a post at Chedaboutou (now Guysborough); it fished and hunted sealions, selling the fish in Lisbon or Cadiz and the sealion skins in La Rochelle.

Challe had to travel to Quebec overland in difficult conditions (the journey lasted forty-three days in snowstorms) and was seriously ill for a time. He returned to France in 1684, presented a memorandum to Seignelay about Arcadia, and undertook a series of voyages in the next three years. The order and purpose have yet to be established, but he was in Rome, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Constantinople, Smyrna and Jerusalem. He was back in Canada in 1687 or 1688 and Chedaboutou was flourishing. The appearance of English troops led by Carter put paid to that. Challe lost seventeen men, was forced to surrender, was taken prisoner to Boston, and the pelts and fish products were seized. His business was ruined.

He was transferred from Boston to London, where he met the exiled writer Saint-Evremond, and then returned to France, probably early in 1689; war between England and France put an end to any hopes of reviving the fishing business in Canada. He became a scrivener on the *Ecueil*, a ship belonging to the French Indies Company, commanded by Hurtain, whom he had known in Arcadia. The ship was part of a squadron going to the Indies on a journey which lasted from February 1690 to August 1691. The purpose of the expedition was trade, to bolster the flagging fortunes of the company which were ever weaker than its

English or Dutch rivals.² The ships went to the Cape Verde Islands, the Comoros, Pondichéry, Balassor (near modern Calcutta), the Negrides Islands off the southern coast of modern Burma, and returned through Balassor, Pondichéry (where they loaded merchandise), Ascension Island, Martinique in the Antilles, and then France.

Challe, then thirty-three, left the *Ecueil*, joined the *Prince* as scrivener, and took part, indirectly, in the battle of the Hougue near Cherbourg in 1692, which Tourville won against the combined English and Dutch fleets. He was involved in a legal wrangle which fortunately had to be settled by the company director and former co-ambassador to Siam, Céberet, who probably helped him to evade imprisonment. He appears to have ceased to be a scrivener in 1694.

Little is known about his life in the next few years. He certainly turned to serious writing in this period, seeking to register a work in 1702 and three more in 1705. All were refused by Seignelay's successor, Pontchartrain. He appears to have caught a venereal disease and went to take the curative waters at Sainte-Reine in Burgundy in 1705. In 1712, he married Marie Duvert, who was only able to sign the marriage register with a cross. The year of the signing of the peace of Utrecht with England, 1713, was the year of publication of Challe's first work in print, *Les Illustres Françaises*; this came out with de Hondt in The Hague, and only one review of it appeared, in the *Journal Littéraire* of The Hague; Challe, who was away on a provincial tour and did not see it until the end of the year, wrote to thank the journalists responsible and kept up a correspondence with them for five years. Holland was an important centre of French publications throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because no official approval was required before any text could appear. Challe had made contact with free-thinking circles in Amsterdam in 1682 and was impressed by the freedom of expression permitted in Holland.

His work as a barrister took him into the provinces, and when none came, he wrote. Almost nothing is known about his life after his last letter to the *Journal Littéraire* in 1718; he was said to be living in poverty in Chartres. He certainly died there, on 27 January 1721; the notification of his death gave his name as Robert Chasle, barrister to the courts, aged about fifty-nine years. No mention is made of his wife, but the act states he received the last sacraments.

The novel *Les Illustres Françaises*, though his first published work, was one of the last to be written. The first, the *Journal d'un Voyage fait aux Indes Orientales*, was written, as the title page indicated, from 1690–1691, but was published posthumously in Rouen in 1721. His manuscript of Volume VI of the *Admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche* was published in 1702 under the name of Filleau de Saint-Martin, who in fact wrote the fifth volume. Three novels, *L'Heureuse rencontre*, *histoire galante*, *L'Histoire secrète d'Henri second dit Plantaganet, roi d'Angleterre*, and *La Constance ou les Amours de Petrarque*, were all written in 1705 and rejected by Pontchartrain. Another, *Tablettes Chronologiques*, sent for publication in The Hague, has been lost. His *Mémoires* were written after his return from the Indies until 1701, and his philosophical work *Difficultés sur la religion proposées au père Malebranche* was

partly published in 1767 and not completely until much later. The only important notice concerning the author in the eighteenth century was Prosper Marchand's *Mémoire touchant l'auteur des Illustres Françaises* of 1748; Marchand formed part of the team of young Franco-Dutch journalists who ran the *Journal Littéraire* which gave the only contemporary review of Challe's novel.

Challe, in all his travels, never in fact set foot in Siam. The nearest he got to the country was the uninhabited islands to the north of Mergui, in which port the ships of his squadron were supposed to land the Siamese "mandarins" accompanying Fr. Tachard. The entire French squadron met there, but for reasons which are not made clear never proceeded to Mergui, then Siamese territory. One reason was undoubtedly that the French were still uncertain of the reception that they would be given in 1690, so soon after the siege of their fort in Bangkok in 1688, their ignominious withdrawal from Mergui itself in June 1688, and their occupation (with three Siamese hostages) of Phuket from July 1689 to early 1690. Another important reason was that the ships were not in a condition to engage in combat if required; they lost more than 100 men while spending almost four weeks (from 19 October to 14 November 1690) in the Negrides and failed to seize an English ship, for not one of the French ships was in a condition to take one on. Negrides,³ Challe makes clear, was not Siamese but Peguan. The weather too was an obstacle to their designs. On 10 October 1690, Challe records there was not a breath of wind and "the devil protects the Siamese idols and does not want us to lay hands on them" (p. 326 in the 1979 edition, as for all future references). On 17 October he comments, "The Siamese idols will keep their gold layers because there was no wind all day," but by the time the squadron reached the Negrides, all thoughts of reaching Mergui had been abandoned.

The two remaining Siamese mandarins on board the *Gaillard*, Okkhun Chamnam and Okkhun Vicet, were eventually offloaded at Balassor, to return in a Dutch or Portuguese ship. They left in November 1690 for Mergui, carrying a grovelling letter from Tachard to the Phra Klang, Kosa Pan.

What, then, is the link between Challe and Siam? Simply that there are numerous references in the *Journal d'un Voyage fait aux Indes Orientales* to the recent events in the country, and a host of characters who had active parts in those events make their appearance in the pages of Challe. Few are Siamese: the King of Siam, his daughter and Petracha ("Petrachard") are there, as of course are Monsieur Constance (Phaulkon), his wife and son, and the major players on the French side—Tachard (whom clearly Challe loathed, in which he was far from being alone), the Missionaries Charmot and Poquet, the ambassadors Chaumont, Choisy, Céberet and La Loubère, the naval captains Vaudricourt and de Joyeux, and the military commanders Infantry Major Du Bruant and Marshal Desfarges.

It is hard to deny that the fleet in which Challe sailed was less successful than it might have been. The war with the Dutch meant that obvious ports of call, which the first and second French embassies had used when going to Siam, were denied them. The only successful bit of trading was the final loading at Pondichéry and the entrepôt trade from Balassor. But the fleet

did manage (by flying the Dutch flag) to attack, in the Comoros in July 1690, the English vessel *Philip Harbert*, the captain of which blew up his ship rather than surrender, and capture the Dutch vessel *Monfort de Batavia*, laden with gold, cloth and rice, off Ceylon in the same month.

Challe's work contains wonderful little tales, novellas really, with no connection either to Siam or the voyage, an example of which is the revenge taken by a Parisian cuckold. It also has snippets of information like the term *un bâtard de cotillon* (a petticoat bastard) given to any protégé of Madame de Maintenon, the king's mistress, and the use of turtle meat to cure venereal diseases. These do not concern us here. There is no coherent account of the events of 1688 in Siam in the text. On two occasions Challe mentions that at the end of his journal is a narrative of these events, particularly as related by Monsieur de la Touche, who was taken on board at Pondichéry on the second stop to return to France, after having been held prisoner in Siam. But this account was not published in the first edition and appears to be lost. However, other accounts are not lacking.

Before dealing with Siamese generalities and the different personalities involved, we need to consider the form of the *Journal* and the influence on Challe of an earlier *Journal de Voyage au Siam*, namely that of the Abbé de Choisy, written in 1685–1686 and published in 1687. Choisy wrote daily entries of his embassy (as coadjutant ambassador to Chaumont) addressed to his friend the Abbé de Dagneau. Five years later Challe wrote frequent, sometimes daily entries, to an unnamed Monsieur (possibly, according to Jean Mesnard, Pierre Raymond, a maternal uncle of Challe). Very early on in the text, Challe writes:

Proposing to write every evening about what occurred in the day, you should not hope to find one of the flowery styles which render all sorts of accounts desirable; but one can be certain of finding, apart from exactitude, the pure and simple truth. I am naturally sincere, and incapable of posing; so you can safely believe what you read in the narrative, being quite resolved to give my account the lie to the vulgar proverb which says that it is good to falsify to someone who comes from afar. I shall write nothing but that I have seen it for myself, or which has at least been told to me under the assurance of persons worthy of credence, and whose exactitude does not appear to me to be suspect, and I shall distinguish what I shall have seen from what I have learnt, so that the two can be separated (p. 61).

This is an echo of Choisy's statement which appears similarly early in his account:

I promised you a journal of my voyage, and I am getting ready to keep my word. I shall write down every evening what I have seen, or what is called seen; I shall write what I have been told and note the name and qualities of those who have related something to me, so that you will be able to give due

consideration to their testimony. I shall exaggerate nothing, having always the exact truth before my eyes... (Choisy, 3 March 1685).

There are frequent references to Choisy's text in Challe who obviously had read very attentively the earlier *Journal de Voyage* (indeed, he had a copy on his journey), and does not hesitate to state that Choisy exaggerates or even fails to tell the truth (despite Choisy's protestations to do so).

The first direct reference to Choisy occurs in Challe's entry for Sunday 5 March 1690 and refers to Choisy's entry in his *Journal de Voyage* for 7 March 1685. Challe was on board the *Ecueil*, as noted, which he considered the best ship in the squadron. The *Florissant* and the *Gaillard* were slow, and the *Oiseau* worse

... in spite of what the Abbé de Choisy, with a mean pun as base as it is false, saying in his *Journal* of Siam that the *Oiseau* proceeds like a bird: a conjuncture and a play on words more worthy of a pedant and a ridiculous person than an honest man (p. 92).

Choisy says that the *Oiseau* often had to wait for the *Maligne*, that it was well named "and I hope to meet those naval gentlemen on my journey who said it was worst of the King's ships; it is perhaps the best."

But curiously the next paragraph in Challe's entry, which starts "It is beginning to be hot. The sun is coming towards us, and we are going towards it; it is the way for us to meet soon (p. 92)," is a direct echo of Choisy's own words on 29 March 1685, when he says "We should meet the sun this afternoon."

The theme of the sluggishness of the *Oiseau* is taken up again by Challe on 13 March 1690: "May the Abbé de Choisy say what he pleases about the *Oiseau*, it proceeds like a turtle, the *Florissant* as well" (p. 126).

The second direct reference to Choisy's text occurs on 9 March 1690 as Challe passes the Canaries. Gomberville, he notes, set his novel *Polexandre* (1629) there; very edifying reading for an ecclesiastic like the Abbé de Choisy, writes Challe sarcastically, who, if he had set foot there, would have sought out the beautiful Alcidiene (Choisy's entry occurs on 10 March 1685).

Is it for a man of his position to read this sort of book? And if he had read it when young, is it in his honour to make known that he remembers it? He gave the public his *Journal* of Siam; I concede that he wanted at all points to be light-hearted; but such pleasantries are not to the taste of everyone. What is suitable for a man of the times is not at all suitable for a man of the cloth, with such a holy ministry as his. I have his book, and I shall be much surprised if before the end of the journey and of my journal we do not have, he and me, some dispute between us, in spite of the sincere respect I have for him (p. 99).

Challe sometimes, rarely, finds grounds for agreement with Choisy, though. On 28 March 1690, after his officers had tried eating a porpoise, Challe wrote:

We ate it on this spit, and in a stew and the Abbé de Choisy has, for once, reason to say that the tastes of sailors are depraved (p. 151).

The reference to Choisy occurs in the entries for 23 and 24 March 1685; he concludes, "I no longer trust sailors' tastes; they are always hungry."

In respect of the ceremonies observed for passing the Line, Challe makes two references to Choisy's text in his entry for 29 April 1690. He agrees with Choisy (once more) that to call the ceremonies a baptism, as the sailors do, is to profane such a holy name. The end of the ceremony comes with the dousing and blacking of the initiates, "not by whipping the cabin boys, as the Abbé de Choisy relates. During the eight years I have been at sea, I have never seen the ceremony practised other than as today" (pp. 191–2). Choisy describes the ceremony in his entry for 8 April 1685:

So, with the Line more than passed, we had the ceremony this morning. All the sailors who had already crossed it were armed with tongs, pincers, cooking pots, and cauldrons. At their head was a drummer darker than the mandarins, and for captain they had a trembling old fellow who could easily have sung "'Tis a heavy burden to be eighty years old." This company, after having done their drill, lined up beside a bucket or tub full of water, in which according to the ancient rite everyone who had not yet crossed the Line had to be dipped. His Excellency the Ambassador appeared before the court first, and promised, with his hand on a map of the world, to observe the ceremony, if ever he recrossed the Line, and in order not to be doused he put in the basin a fistful of silver. I did the same, as did all the officers, and those who had the wherewithall to buy their way out. The rest were plunged into the tub and drenched in twenty buckets of water. Nearly sixty crowns were collected, which will be spent on buying refreshments for the crew. It is an invariably observed custom to require the cabin boys to whip each other, and with this finish the festival. But today we were weary, and the cabin boys had respite until the first calm befalls, when they will be roundly whipped to produce some wind.

Challe however points out that there was more to it than that:

Mr. de Choisy has omitted a circumstance which certainly merits being recorded, since it is what attracts the most attention in this comedy. It is that those who place their hand on the map of the world

are given the name of a promontory, a cape, a gulf, a port, an island, or something which is found at sea, and this requirement exercises and excites some small vengeance on the part of the sailors, who make a kind of lampoon of it, which is not without its piquancy. I shall give but three examples. One of our passengers is a woman who has herself talked about and who does not pass any more as a vestal [virgin]. They called her the Cleft Cape, which is a point on Newfoundland Island. We had another passenger who is as witty as a devil, but who does not appear to be particularly religious. They called him the Devil's Undertow, an eddy near Santo Domingo. A rather gallant lady accompanied us to Canada. She was named the Bay of Heat, which bay is at the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River... (p. 192).

In his entry for 1 May 1690, Challe returns to Choisy's comments about the *Oiseau*, in particular his comment that the hold was as fresh as a cellar and that they did not feel the heat of the equator (Choisy's entry is dated 10 April 1685). Challe accuses Choisy of not having gone into the hold:

Duval, our maitre d'hôtel, who undertook the same journey as he and on the same vessel, whom I have just sent for and questioned, told me that the bottom of the hold of the *Oiseau* was just as hot as is ours at present, where one cannot breathe (p. 194).

In saying Choisy had never been in the hold, Challe is wrong, for the Chevalier de Forbin gave Choisy a conducted tour of the hold on 21 May 1685; however, this visit did not take place at the Line itself, but in the temperate zone, ten days before arriving at the Cape.

Challe goes on to accuse both the Ambassador Chaumont and his co-adjutant ambassador Choisy of not wishing to doff their broadcloth clothes in spite of the heat because of their rank.

They preferred to sweat than to have other people know that they were men cast in the same mould as others, who, out of respect for them, did not dare appear in their presence but in decent attire, but who were in their shirtsleeves as soon as they were out of their sight, and who posted guards to give warning of the moment others were going to appear, in order to have time to take up either their jackets or their jerkins (p. 194).

This, Challe continues, would conform to the truth, and not that God had created a miracle in their favour. He finishes with a little twist in the wound:

I do not accuse Mr. de Choisy of pride; this low passion does not accord with a man of honour and position; but he will allow me to say that a small

point of vanity often causes a false step when we want to raise ourselves above our humanity and elevate ourselves to heroism (p. 194).

Choisy's reference to keeping their clothes occurs on 19 March 1685 but his party was only just in the tropics then, at 16°50', and still far from the equator, which they did not cross until 7 April 1685. Before this, on 10 March, he wrote, "We begin to take off our coats, tomorrow our jackets, and in four days, they say, our jerkins." Furthermore, on 30 April 1685 Choisy noted, "We wear our jackets again," after re-entering the temperate zone.

Challe, on 5 May 1690, describes how the water is kept, and locked up, to prevent the sailors from drinking too much and perspiring excessively, and how a tot of brandy was better for them than water. For some reason he takes on Choisy again over this point: "If things were different for his voyage it is because he was lucky enough for nature not to be disturbed" (p. 198). Duval again assured him it was the same on board the *Oiseau*, and Challe promises himself to check with Mr. de Chamoreau, then ensign with Duval, and now captain of the *Lion* which was one of the squadron. Choisy described the water in the hold on 10 April 1685, shortly after crossing the Line. "Our wine remains strong, the water fine, and what is difficult to believe we drink it fresh, not chilled of course, but as if it had come from the bottom of a well." The restriction imposed on the sailors on the use of wine in preference for brandy is described on 17 June 1685. Challe is determined to take Choisy to task over the alleged purity of the water on board, and returns to the charge when he lays sight on Chamoreau (14 May 1690).

I showed him what caused me pain in the Journal of the Abbé de Choisy. He replied that one could not stop a man from writing; that this purity of the water, this freshness and the rest, were equally imaginary. I then showed him the present pages of this journal 193 and 194, which did not square with those of the Abbé. He approved of them, and added that perhaps he [the Abbé] had some secret reason to conceal the fatigues of those who go to the Indies; that he had written about many unnecessary things, and omitted essentials, such as the number of young Siamese destined for the Church by the Missionaries who preceded them in procession with cross and banner;⁴ that he did not accuse him, nevertheless of having any evil intention in his writings, but that at least, when one writes for publication, one should be held to account for what one writes; and that in this case one should only write the pure and simple truth, devoid of all passion. Whatever the case, he added on rising [to leave], Duval was right to tell you that the water and the heat were as this year (p. 206).

Challe concurs (on 31 May 1690: p. 217) that Choisy was right to say that the governor of the Cape of Good Hope had gone exploring (in his entries for 8 June 1685 and 20 March 1686), but Challe's observations in regard to the Cape are second-

hand, since because of the European wars his ship was unable to put in there, whereas Choisy went ashore on both the outward and return journeys, and gathered a considerable amount of information about the Dutch at the Cape (see his entries from 1 to 8 June 1685).

Challe is quite wrong to take the Abbé de Choisy to task for his comments on the island of Madagascar. Like Challe, Choisy never went there, and the only mention of the island is to say, on 19 June 1685, that his party thought they were opposite it. Yet Challe in his entry for 12 June 1690 has no less than three references to supposed remarks by Choisy as to the origins of the peoples of Madagascar, coming on a Turkish vessel to Mecca and being lost at sea. Challe appears to be confusing Choisy with another author, and for once his reading of Choisy was not particularly attentive.

Challe's last reference to Choisy's text occurs in his entry for 15 March 1691, when he returns to the theme already mentioned, that the *Oiseau* travelled badly, in spite of what Choisy claimed (p. 466). One should perhaps point out that Choisy had only the *Maligne* to compare with, whereas Challe's squadron comprised the *Gaillard* (48 cannons, 450 men) flying the admiral's flag, the *Oiseau* (also 48 cannons and 450 men), the *Florissant* (38 cannons, 350 men, and captained by de Joyeux, who on Choisy's journey commanded the *Maligne*), two small frigates, the *Dragon* (24 cannons, 100 crew and 50 soldiers) and the *Lion* (similarly equipped, and commanded by Mr. de Chamoreau, who was ensign on the Chaumont-Choisy mission on board the *Oiseau*) and Challe's own *Ecueil* (like the *Florissant*, 38 cannons and 350 men).

The principal ambassador of the 1685 mission, Chaumont, is only mentioned twice by Challe; once in passing (p. 60) when indicating Chamoreau accompanied that embassy, and once more substantively, in his long entry for 24 January 1691 (p. 391), when he quotes verbatim from the Chevalier de Chaumont's *Relation* (1687, p. 110), who cites the King of Siam saying he was much pleased that the Jesuits were in accord with the Bishop of Metellopolis (Laneau, the head of the Missionaries in Siam), and agreeing to meet the Jesuits who had been sent by Louis XIV to go to China to practice mathematical observations. We shall return to the matter of the Jesuits.

Mr. de Vaudricourt, the commander on the first embassy of the *Oiseau*, only gets passing mention; Chamoreau's entries have already been noted, and Forbin is not mentioned by Challe (Forbin's *Memoires* appeared in 1729 after Challe's death). The valiant Desclouzeaux, superintendent of the port in Brest, appears in Challe's pages too, but he had no connection with Siam other than furnishing supplies for ships going there.

Joyeux, though, gets frequent mention. He hailed from Oléron and his naval career started, like Challe's as scrivener, in 1662. He was only a *lieutenant de port* when he left for Siam in 1685 in command of the *Maligne*, was made frigate captain in 1687 when he commanded the *Loire* as part of the squadron sent to Siam. He died in Rochefort in 1699. Unlike Choisy, Challe is not above a bit of tittle-tattle, and he has plenty in respect

of de Joyeux. He was not, according to Challe, very pleased at having to undertake the voyage in 1690, "perhaps because he had a superior, and would have liked to be commander-in-chief." Challe continues:

The gossip is that he remarried recently a lady from Normandy whose vivacity he is aware of; who, they say, had not had whites since the sacrament, and who did nonetheless present him with a natural work after six months, and he is afraid that during the journey she will console herself for his absence with another (p. 59).

Perhaps on this account, Challe notes, his manners were very curt and not at all like those of Mr. Duquesne-Guiton, the commander-in-chief. Joyeux nevertheless "passes for a very good officer, a very good sailor, and a most brave man" (p. 59). However, Challe was to revise his opinion of Joyeux's seamanship because of the foolish manoeuvre he made in the attack on Madras (related on 25 August 1690) which put his ship at risk and destroyed the French plan of attack.

The leaders of the second French embassy to Siam, 1687-8, La Loubère (here Lubère) and particularly Céberet are also mentioned. La Loubère's great work on Siam is not mentioned as it was published in French after Challe's departure. Céberet du Boullay, as a director of the French Indies Company, however, figures large, and he was also a patron of Challe, as noted earlier. The first mention of Céberet involved a dispute to which Challe was party. The details of this have no bearing on Siam, but on 28 February 1690 Challe gives a number of details about Céberet:

He is the son of the late M. Céberet, secretary to the King, one of the first concerned with the Company of Guinea, he had always liked the navy, had undertaken many long journeys, and in Martinique had married a relative of Mme de Maintenon. This is a good source of support and protection. But it is all the same true that his merit does not lie therein, but undoubtedly in his probity, in inexpressible zeal for the King's interests and service, in indefatigable work, in continual application to his duties; he is not at all a man for tomorrow, but decides everything in the moment; he had an intelligent mind, lively, ardent, and yet ever tranquil; so judicious that to now no one has complained of his decisions; in a word, a man such as I should like to have as my superior for the rest of my days. Accessible and affable to everyone, forgiving of human weaknesses, laughing at them when made public but saying nothing about them when they are secret, but in both cases, a very severe preacher, when alone with the concerned. Very well turned physically, with an open and happy physiognomy. He was Ambassador to Siam; it was he who established the Company's godowns there, and which

were ruined in 1688 by the revolution which took place there. He was a friend of and much esteemed by Mr. Constance [Phaulkon], chief minister of that kingdom, and was much affected by his death, and that of the King our ally (p. 77).

Céberet did not establish the French Indies Company's activities in Siam, the honours for which go to André Deslandes-Boureau in 1680. Véret was in charge during the events of 1688, with unfortunate consequences. It was Céberet who arranged for Phaulkon to become one of the largest shareholders in the Company (he asked to be one of its ten directors in January 1688), and much of his fortune, amounting to 300,000 *livres*, was given for this, leading, after the release from prison on the death of Petracha of "Madame Constance", to protracted correspondence with the Company in an attempt to lay hands on some of the money. Céberet makes two other appearances in Challe's text, one as judge of an abuse of position by a fellow officer, but neither concerning Siam.

The general in overall command of the French troops on the La Loubère-Céberet mission, Desfarges, appears frequently in the pages of Challe. Desfarges's role in the final dénouement of the events in 1688 in Lopburi, Ayudhya and Bangkok is well known and needs no repetition here. Challe rightly castigates Desfarges for his

... vulgar avarice, his unreasonable jealousy, his interested trust ... [and for] cowardly betraying the confidence of the King of Siam and Mr. Constance in him.... Under his command, the French ... in spite of themselves were responsible for a thousand vile cowardices and lost in that kingdom the reputation of the French name (p. 510).

Desfarges, Challe informs us, boarded the *Oriflamme* on leaving the French fort at Bangkok "which he could and should have defended against the troops of Petracha." His two sons joined him ("as brave as he was not"), taking four Jesuits and the immense wealth which Phaulkon had placed in his hands.

This wealth was the sole cause of the loss of Siam, of our cowardice, of the death of the King of Siam, of Mr. Constance and many others; it was the cause of the Princess of Siam being abandoned, although only daughter and heiress to the Kingdom, which she destined to the Marquis Desfarges in marrying him; it was the cause of the loss of Mme Constance and her only son, handed over to Petracha with the most extreme cowardice ever known, only because, if the mother or the son had gone to France, it would have been necessary for the vultures to share their prey and they would have had to release it from their grip; finally, it added to the misery and caused the persecution of our religion and its true and zealous ministers suffered and still suffer on this account (p. 511).

The idea that the Princess Queen would marry (or even had married) the young Marquis Desfarges, elder son of the general, is beyond the bounds of credibility. Although all Westerners to the court of King Narai were fascinated with the stories about Princess (Kromluang) Yothathep, not one of them had ever seen her, not even Phaulkon; one suspects that, in part, the whiff of supposed (but rather unlikely) incest in her relationship was added spice concerning an unknown oriental princess. Since General Desfarges shamefully handed over Mme Constance, a countess—recently created, it is true—of France to slavery and Petracha, he is unlikely to have made any gesture to save Kromluang Yothathep from Petracha's harem, though being rapacious, he might have if he thought he could lay hands on some of the royal treasure. If this were so, the implication is that Phaulkon's wealth was greater, or perhaps simply more accessible. As is known, Yothathep was made regent by her father on 10 May 1688 in the event of his death, which occurred on 10 or 11 July, but Petracha had himself declared king and crowned on 1 August, and Yothathep was forced to become one of Petracha's wives. The suggestion of her marrying the Marquis Desfarges, and of his becoming consequently King of Siam, is altogether preposterous, given the realities of the situation (to which the French were perhaps not willing to admit).

The rest of Challe's story concerning the Desfarges family relates to the activities of the two sons, the marquis and the chevalier, in Martinique, where their ship was driven after leaving Pondichéry and passing the Cape (the general had the good fortune to die at sea off the Cape and so avoid a court martial). These details Challe obtained at first hand in Martinique, which his ship reached on 4 June 1691. The young marquis and knight threw their money (or rather Phaulkon's) around in their two months on the island, paying fortunes for their female companions (the favours of at least one, according to Challe, could have been had by the jailors at the Châtelet for nothing). Between them, they spent 100,000 *écus* just on their distractions. When upbraided for such a lack of restraint so closely following the death of their father, they replied that

they could not be too overjoyed at the death of a man who had snatched the crown of Siam from the elder, and the command from the younger, and who, for all the king's goodness, could not have escaped the rope in France (p. 512).

This was witnessed by one Mr. Cléand and certified as true by the sieur Joubert; one of the mistresses of the Desfarges, known to Challe from his days in Paris, also told him that the younger had frequently repeated the same tale. Such a story, in spite of so many witnesses, still seems altogether too unlikely. One wonders if exoticism had gone to their heads when they were sent as gauges of their father's word to Petracha; or were there activities taking place in Lopburi and Ayudhya between them and the princess which have failed to come to light elsewhere?

At all events, the marquis and the chevalier Desfarges did not live to repeat their tale in France. Challe says the *Oriflamme* carrying them back there sank in an engagement with a British

ship off Santa Lucia, but Van der Cruysse notes that their ship sank in a storm off Brest on 27 February 1691, just before returning. Both perished at sea, and their father's and Phaulkon's fortune was lost with them.

One other military character on the French side who took a decisive part in the French disaster also appears in Challe's pages. This is du Bruant, whose part was more honourable than Desfarges, and who valiantly tried to defend the French outpost established at Mergui. Challe speaks of him on 14 September 1690 in relation to Mergui:

... a place in the Kingdom of Siam where the French were established and where, under the protection of the King our ally, and of Mr. Constance, his chief minister, they had built a fort, of which Mr. Du Bruant was governor, a brave, exact, and faithful man. To go from Bengal to Mergui, you do not have to pass the Straits of Sunda, between the island of Sumatra and the peninsula of Malacca, because, although Mergui was and remains part of the Kingdom of Siam, it is built on lands which are part of this peninsula of Malacca, at the extreme west of the country and to the east of Bengal, 17 degrees latitude north. It is there that Mr. du Bruant left, the last of the French; and from where, before being forced to leave, he showed as much as he could that he was not part of the cowardice committed by our nation in Louvo [Lopburi], throughout the kingdom, and especially in Bangkok, our chief fortress; cowardice so overwhelming that the French name is held in horror (p. 317).

Du Bruant had started the construction of a fortress at Mergui, but after the events in Lopburi of May 1688, the French in Mergui were denied provisions; finally, on 24 June, they seized a Siamese vessel, the *Mergui*, and left together with a small English ship, not without loss of life. Their wanderings around the Bay of Bengal for the next six months were nightmarish; they finally reached Balassor, but their Siamese ship was seized by the English and the surviving French, numbering some thirty persons, were transferred to Madras and eventually to Pondichéry. Desfarges led the remnants of the French forces (numbering in all 350, out of 800 troops sent to Siam) on an expedition to Junk Ceylon Island (Phuket) on 14 April 1689; the island had been granted to the French by treaty. The French stayed in Phuket from July 1689 to early 1690, hunting and fishing, bargaining the three Siamese hostages with them for freeing French prisoners and resuming trade. They returned to Pondichéry in February 1690. Martin sent the remaining fleet to France, against du Bruant's advice.

The only other military person with connections with Siam, though in this case they are rather tenuous, is the Marquis d'Eragny, Viceroy of Martinique in July 1691 when Challe was there, but who had been designated to go to Siam to be in charge of the French troops; the news of the death of King Narai caused his mission to be cancelled and his being given a new appointment.

Sufficient has been said of the French diplomatic and military persons involved to allow one to appreciate the number of scattered references by Challe to the Siamese players in the drama, notably King Narai (who is never named as such), the Princess Queen, his daughter, (who is also never named), and the usurper Petracha (Opra Pitracha). Mr. Constance [Phaulkon], his wife and son have already been mentioned in relation to the events. Challe adds nothing to our knowledge of the so-called revolution in relation to them.

He does, though, have a wealth of detail concerning Father Tachard, the evil genius of the French imbroglio, not least because Tachard was with Challe's expedition; given Challe's loathing of all Jesuits, fortunately for both, he was on the flagship the *Gaillard*, not Challe's *Ecueil*, and accompanied by three Siamese mandarins, otherwise ranking officials. It should be recalled that this was Tachard's third journey to Siam; the first was in the company of Chaumont and Choisy, the second that of La Loubère and Céberet. If on the first he had caused no trouble, he had returned from it with secret missives from Phaulkon to the king's confessor, Father de la Chaize. Tachard's behaviour on the second mission is unforgivable; he had again secret instructions, this time from Seignelay to Phaulkon, making the two French ambassadors merely decorative, and behaved atrociously towards both. Even worse, on the return journey he went in the capacity of Siamese ambassador to the court of Louis XIV, and his paranoia in relation to La Loubère on board ship is now well known (for details, see Jacq-Hergoualc'h's 1992 edition of Céberet's *Journal*). On this third outward journey in Challe's squadron, he was still ambassador but representing a king who was dead and who had been replaced by a chauvinistic usurper. Tachard's position was therefore equivocal, no less so than the Siamese accompanying him (who, however, because of their connections with Petracha, were undisturbed). Challe wondered how the mandarins would survive in their own country "where no wine is produced," since they had consumed such quantities in Paris and Port-Louis before embarking.

One of these mandarins, Okmun Pipith (though not named by Challe, his name is given in Tachard's unpublished relation of his third voyage) had the misfortune to fall ill and die early on in the voyage. Challe was scandalized that he received a six gun salute, each shot separated by a quarter of an hour, an honour reserved for officers of the king who die at sea. "What would they do for a general?" he asked rhetorically, adding that a two gun salute would have been enough, and Tachard was responsible for the four others. This is true: Tachard wished to honour the first Siamese mandarin to convert to Catholicism, though Tachard maintains that only five shots were fired.

At the first port of call, the Cape Verde Islands, Tachard made sure he was given a Spanish jennet which belonged to the governor "and was worth more than eighty pistoles in France." How could any Portuguese or Spaniard refuse something of a Jesuit, Challe asked, "and above all a Jesuit who was ambassador of the King of Siam?" He adds that Tachard did not get from the bishop what he wanted all the same, but what this was he does not relate. Tachard was lodged along with the commander

of the squadron, Duquesne-Guiton, and the commissioner, in the governor's residence. Challe returns to the bishop and his refusal to grant Tachard's request, whatever it was, saying that the bishop was a better theologian since what Tachard wanted was against the precepts of Jesus Christ and the holy canons. Challe fired another barb against Tachard during his stay on the Cape Verde Islands by pointing out that neither he nor the four Jesuits on the *Florissant* had any desire to fast, even though it was the first Monday of Holy Week, 20 March 1690. Two weeks later Tachard was witness to a prank played on Challe and laughed mightily, undoubtedly pleased to get his own back on someone who was unlikely ever to have shown him much respect.

After the encounter with the *Philip Harbert*, Tachard's quarters were found to be immune from bullets,

which was not the case of Mr. de Charmot's, one of our Missionaries: his makes one feel sorry; everything is broken and destroyed... I would like to know why he was more troubled than Father Tachard. It is not, in my belief, the lack of sanctity which is in cause ... (p. 262).

It was when in Pondichéry in August 1690 that the current situation in Siam was made clear: that Petracha was absolute ruler, that "the King of Siam our ally had died an unknown death, that Mr. Constance died after torture a week later, and that it was not known what had become of his wife and children and the Princess of Siam." In fact, Phaulkon was arrested on 18 May and tortured until his death on 5 June. Report had it that the Catholics, particularly the Missionaries, continued to be persecuted, some in irons and many tortured. Here follows Challe's love of detail, without which we should know less of some of the customs of Ayudhyan prisons.

... [one of the Missionaries] named Poquet has been forced every night, to lick more than twenty times, with his tongue, the parts of a cursed tormentor which decency forbids one to name (p. 287).

The fourteen other Missionaries were not better treated. The English traders fared no better than the French and had to abandon everything. Only the Jesuits were spared, and a long diatribe against them follows. Challe maintains they were offered money to leave Siam, but says that would only attract them there.

Whatever the case, the Reverend Father Tachard does not wish to request of Petracha the confirmation of his rank of ambassador which the late King of Siam accorded him, and his journey to Siam is over, and his mission imperfect, if things do not change in their appearance (p. 288).

On the return to Pondichéry in January 1691, more news, received through Portuguese channels, had reached the French

outpost concerning the situation in Siam. Petracha was said to be less antipathetic to the Christian priests, and Charmot was, therefore, hoping to be able to go to China via Siam. Tachard decided to remain in Pondichéry. He therefore left his ship, and "His Excellency" was given a five gun salute.

I would piously believe that his humility did not expect this honour; that, even, he would have prevented this being given him if he had been warned that it was proposed; for, from his baptism, he renounced worldly pomp. Alas! His modesty was deceived (p. 390).

Challe never misses an occasion to stab a Jesuit, in the back or in the front.

The attacks of Tachard and the Jesuits reach greater heights in Challe's "Conference with Mr. Martin" at Pondichéry on 25 January 1691. This time, though, the words purport to be Mr. Martin's. There is no reason to doubt Challe's honest reportage here, for his journal was destined to be read by the Marquis de Seignelay, and Challe would not, on that account, have attributed to Martin words he did not speak; Seignelay would certainly check. One detail revealed here could be called the affair of the diamonds.

The tale is rather complicated. Tachard was staying on in Pondichéry, and currently owed the Company "more than 50,000 piastres, which at three *livres* each, in French money, are worth 450,000 *livres*, with no other assurance than settlements of accounts" (p. 422). The Jesuits were engaged in private trade, according to Martin; thirty of the fifty-eight bales brought from France by the squadron were sent, after discussions with Tachard, by the Jesuits to Madras (the rival English emporium). The Jesuits hide as much as they can their trading "because it is directly contrary to the precepts of Jesus Christ concerning missions" (p. 423). The Jesuits trade in diamonds, according to François Martin, as reported by Challe. They transport them in false heels of shoes, to sell them at profit (there follows a long and rather amusing story of how this was discovered, in Surat). The Missionaries did not dare attack the Jesuits in their trading, perhaps because they indulged in it themselves. Martin finished by asking what Tachard, the other Jesuits and the Missionaries were doing by staying on in Pondichéry; he, who was in charge, had no idea. They maintained an apparent peace between each other, and perhaps were contriving means to cause each other difficulties in Europe, where he would like to see the lot, "especially the Jesuits, who are hated here as the very devil, and yet respected by everyone because everyone fears them" (p. 443).

These are the last loving words of Challe or Martin concerning Tachard, who was not to go to Siam so soon. Pondichéry was seized by the Dutch in September 1693 and Tachard was taken prisoner to Holland. He finally managed to get to Ayudhya as ambassador (bearing a letter ten years old from Louis XIV to the late King Narai) in January 1699. The visit was not a success; mere formalities were observed, he found the capital deserted, and the merchants gone. This unprepossessing bearded in-

triguer, who lived on until October 1712, was never to go to Siam again, for which all concerned must have been heartily grateful.

Parenthetically, in Challe's *Difficultés sur la Religion* his anti-Jesuit themes and logical objections to Christianity are further developed, and mention is made of the "talapoins" of Siam and their practices.

The Missionary Charmot (whose naiveté on arrival in Siam was noted by Choisy on 26 October 1685) gets a better press from Challe, as has been seen. Martin is made to say that the Missionaries are less supple and more attached to the Evangels. They had few converts, it was true, but they were more constant and better instructed. During the revolution, the poor Poquet, though persecuted, was not abandoned by any of his converted Siamese, any more than the other Missionaries. The native clergy, though in hiding, had helped as much as they could, not only the Missionaries, but also Mme Constance and her mother. They had passed money to her to allow her to escape with her son from prison and seek refuge in the fort in Bangkok (the consequences of which are known).

François Martin remarks that it was the Jesuits who kept the Siamese mandarins in France, and they should have been sent back to Siam from Pondichéry; he could easily have obtained a Portuguese ship to take them (a French ship, given the circumstances, was not possible). He could possibly have made connections and restarted commerce with Siam. But the Jesuits left the mandarins in Baalassar, in order to make them grateful to the Jesuits, and darken the reputation of the French. They would be put on board a Dutch ship, and the mandarins would feel obliged to the Dutch as well as the Jesuits. The Dutch would complete the loss of French reputation.

The French had no love of the Dutch; they were at war. The Dutch, according to Challe, had supplied Petracha with cannoners (p. 365) to remove the French from Bangkok, but not so secretly as the English had helped the Great Mogul, for the Dutch "in the Indies have much less interest in sparing us than any other nation."

Among the rumours circulating, before the squadron reached Pondichéry on 12 August 1690 in order to obtain more accurate information, were: that all the French who were in Siam were now in the French base; that Petracha had killed the king, and had been knifed by "Monpan" (Kosa Pan), "the same person who had gone to France as ambassador, and who had placed the crown on his head" (p. 282). Clearly the rumour mill was grinding; two weeks later, at Pondichéry, Challe was able to record this information was false.

Another reference to the Siamese embassy, albeit indirect, comes in a mention of some vases sent by the King of Siam to Louis XIV, made of a special metal possibly similar to Solomon's gold from Ophir; Challe probably had in mind the metal, much esteemed in Siam at the time, known as *tambac*, a mixture of gold and copper, and said to be more lustrous than gold itself.⁵

It was on the return to Pondichéry that the *Ecueil* took on the previously mentioned Mr. de la Touche, who had been in Siam at the time of the "revolution" (Challe's word)—though he does not say in what capacity—had been imprisoned there, and whose account was to form Challe's regretfully missing

appendix referring to the events in Siam in 1688. De la Touche apparently made a reference to the "painted arms," the praetorian guard or jailors, whose arms are painted, he says (actually tattooed) mostly in black and red. He also referred to the rattan stick which was used to beat the prisoners and which "cut the skin in strips." Challe then adds a curious detail of interest to interior decorators:

The seats and armchairs of Siam, or those which have been very well imitated, especially in the intermeshing parts, are not rare in France; the bottoms or the seating parts and the backs are made of the same canes of rattan (p. 479).

The mode of chinoiserie, which was always interpreted to include anything from the Far East, in respect of furniture, was at its peak in the mid-eighteenth century. It is curious to find this fashion in furniture being declared not unusual in Europe so early. Whilst fashions spread rapidly, it seems unlikely that such chairs became relatively common in the four years after the return of the Chaumont-Choisy embassy in 1686, and they were presumably either early objects of trade from the Ayudhya godown or imports obtained via the Dutch.

Mr. de la Touche had the added information "by an underground rumour" (p. 479) that Petracha wanted to marry the Princess of Siam, that she had rejected him scornfully, being unwilling to marry the murderer of her father, and still less to give herself to him or his son; and Petracha proposed to reduce her by torture or else to cause her death, "it being not good politics to place her in the arms of another, which could lead to the renewal of her rights."

Another person who went to Siam with the La Loubère-Céberet mission but not mentioned in their texts is an apothecary Jacques Vinet, a native of Lyons and who died at the age of twenty-three early on the outward journey of Challe; his liking for drink mixed with his drugs and medications conspired to his early death on 29 March 1690.

After leaving Pondichéry for the return journey, Challe writes of one other piece of Siamesery picked up during his encounters:

I also learned that very easy and convenient marriages were contracted in Siam. In this: neither the father nor the mother provides a dowry for their daughters; on the contrary, they sell them to whomsoever it pleases them, for a price which is agreed; and these daughters, authorized by the agreement of their parents, keep themselves properly married, and remain faithful; and if they were not prudent they would no longer be the wives, but only the slaves of those who had bought them, and in addition to that, their parents would be obliged to return to their supposed son-in-law the money they had received from him, or to give him another daughter to be his wife; and a man so married can, by depositing his money, return his wife to her

parents, who take her back with no objections. If there are children at the time of the separation, the boys stay with the father, the daughters with the mother, who do not fail to give them an education in conformity with their birth... It is not just simple peasants who contract these kinds of marriages and sell their daughters; the most important persons in the kingdom do likewise. This is the universal genius of Orientals; the pleasures of love command all; it is their dominant and favourite passion (p. 396).

Perhaps. La Loubère, in Part II Chapter 7 of his *Kingdom of Siam*, discusses the "portion" or dowry and how this is returned to the woman in case of a divorce. He states that the first, third, fifth, etc., children go to the mother and the second, fourth, sixth, etc., to the father. He does not mention the selling of daughters and more conservatively states "the Love of free persons is not ignominious, at least amongst the Populace." But the arrangements described by the misogynist Challe obviously appealed to him; a little later in the text (p. 397) he says a woman is an object (literally, a piece of furniture) like a freshwater fish: excellent when fresh, satisfying the second day and disgusting the third. He appears to have changed his opinions later to some degree by marrying.

Other incidental details provided by Challe relate to the seizing of the *Maligne* and the *Coche* by the Dutch at the Cape in 1689. In fact it was not the *Maligne* but the *Normande* and the *Coche* which were taken (they were carrying news of events in Siam and had left Pondichéry unaware that war had broken out between France and Holland). Their cargoes, sold in Holland for 240,000 *livres*, brought in more than anything the French had ever brought back from the Indies.

Challe notes, when the French squadron was at Balassor, where there were English and Dutch trading posts as well as French, there was, in front of the French godown

a ship which was built in Siam, bigger, stronger and more beautiful than any in our squadron. It appears to be 800 or 900 tons, and is called the *Siam*; they dare not put it to sea, fearing an incident. It is certainly a pity that such a fine vessel remains unused and decaying. The other nations also have vessels here and have at present as much fear of us as they can give to a single boat. Their vessels go to sea, but the *Siam* stays (p. 374).

This is a curious comment. The ship was a Siamese frigate and, with its sister vessel the *Louvo*, evacuated the French from the fort at Bangkok, alongside the French vessel the *Oriflamme*. They sailed on 13 November 1699, reaching Pondichéry on 1 February 1689, and were used by the French for the expedition to Phuket the same year. Clearly the French should have returned the ship to the Siamese, but hung on to it, doubtless as a bargaining counter. In the changed circumstances at Ayudhya, though, its loss was probably of no great consequence.

Challe reflects on the rivals to the French in the Indies, and his remarks are worth noting in the overall context of the French involvement in Siam. He observes that the organization of the Dutch army, promoting on merit and not influence or commission-buying, should be copied by the French (p. 214). The superiority of the Dutch in the Indies he attributes (p. 368) to French indifference to commerce, and those in charge of its pursuit were, since the death of Colbert, lacking in intelligence. Unlike the English and the Dutch, the French largely traded overland. Challe is less forthright about the ultimate reasons for the failure of the French Indies Company: a lack of a clear objective. The strength of both the Dutch and the English Indies companies was their unique desire for profit, and their companies were organized as commercial enterprises from the start. The French company was not so: it was founded under royal initiative, very few merchants raised capital for it, and almost no successful traders were among its directors (Céberet and Martin were rare exceptions). It was used by Louis XIV to advance not only colonization as in Madagascar, with disastrous results, but also the propagation of Catholicism, itself split, as Challe was delighted to point out, between the Missionaries and the Jesuits. The French tradition of *dirigisme* is an old one.

Challe's record of an aborted journey to Siam makes fascinating reading in itself, but for the lights it throws on the various personalities involved in the French adventure in Siam, it is a valuable document. Its most curious revelation concerns the pretensions of the elder son of Desfarges, whom his father had set as a hostage and guarantee of his word (which he broke) to Petracha in Lopburi, to marry King Narai's only daughter and

assume the crown. Rumour had it, both in Ayudhya and Lopburi, that Phaulkon was proposing to assume the crown on the death of King Narai, or else to rule by proxy through Phra Pi, Narai's protégé and virtually adopted son. There is little in his conduct to suggest that this was true. He certainly could not have married Narai's daughter without changing his faith yet again. Another possibility would be a secret agreement between Phaulkon and the elder Desfarges offspring whereby the marquis would marry the princess and Phaulkon would remain chief minister. This arrangement would leave unresolved the position of Phra Pi. But King Narai, when death was at hand, did indeed place the crown and the regency in the hands of his daughter. The Desfarges-for-king manoeuvre may have been hatched in desperation at the last minute.

Challe took no part in the events leading to the "revolution" of 1688, nor in their unwinding. However, with Tachard, Charriot and three accompanying mandarins returning to Siam with his flotilla on its outward journey, and with at least one survivor of the revolution on its return, and the information gathered at first hand in Martinique relating to Desfarges's sons, Challe was certainly, as ship's scrivener, in a position to record the information he gleaned. Furthermore, he personally knew Céberet and François Martin. Although his pugnaciousness, his peppering of the text with Latin quotes, and his closely reasoned and often repeated attacks on the Catholic Church can on occasions be wearying, the sharpness of his observations and his story-teller's delight in gossip and intrigue make his long-forgotten *Journal d'un Voyage fait aux Indes Orientales* an interesting addition to the huge corpus of works touching on the French imbroglio in Siam.

NOTES

1. The biographic details concerning Challe have been taken with gratitude from the edition by Frédéric Deloffre and Melâhat Menemencioglu (Challe 1979).
2. According to Deloffre and Menemencioglu (Challe 1979), Henri IV granted the monopoly of the trade between France and the Indies in 1604, following the Dutch and English models, to a group of merchants from Dieppe, Rouen and Saint Malo. Not much came of this and in 1642 Richelieu formed another company to service the outposts of Madagascar and trade with the Indies. Settlements were established in Madagascar but trade with the Indies languished. Colbert made a third attempt to promote this trade, carried on almost entirely in English and Dutch bottoms, by creating in 1664 the Compagnie des Indes Orientales, which absorbed what remained of the earlier company. Few merchants adhered to it and it was more of a state organization

from its inception; most of the capital came from public entities (*collectivités*) rather than individual traders. The articles of foundation allowed for a monopoly on navigation and commerce in the Indies, the eastern and southern seas for fifty years; the concession in perpetuity of lands and places occupied, with the right of title (*droit de seigneurie*); and the concession in perpetuity of Madagascar and the nearby islands on condition of propagating the Christian faith there.

The attempt at colonization of Madagascar, begun in 1665, was a disaster and ended in it being finally abandoned in 1674. The trading post or godown of Surat was established in 1666, and Masulipatan in 1669 (it was ruined by 1671). Pondichéry was set up in 1673 under François Martin. In 1683, on Colbert's death, the Compagnie des Indes Orientales became a state organization; Colbert's son, the Marquis de Seignelay, Secretary of State for the Navy, was made

president and his deputies were all bureaucrats.

The godown in Siam was established in 1680 and Deslandes-Boureau obtained a favourable trading treaty for the French. Trade was carried on between Ayudhya, Pondichéry and Surat. But the French Minister Louvois killed the India trade by obtaining a prohibition on the import of printed cloth from the Indies. The trade with Siam then increased in importance until it came to a halt in 1688.

3. The Negrides, sometimes given in the singular and sometimes the plural, were placed by Challe at 16° north and of uncertain longitude, next to the Kingdom of Pegu, three leagues round and separated by half a league of sea, which could be covered on foot at low tide. It was variously termed Negrais, Negraile or, in Arabic texts, Najirashi, and appears on maps at least as early as 1650. A

map by Bellin dated 1775 shows soundings taken in the area around Negrais.

G. D. E. Hall, in *A History of South-East Asia*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968) indicates the island of Negrais is "just south of the mouth of the Bassein river" (p. 490) and was considered by the Madras Council in the 1680s as a possible naval repair station and a base to deal with enemy activities on the other side of the Bay of Bengal.

4. Such a detail hardly appears as essential. However, it is true that Choisy omitted several important things. He draws a discreet veil over the diplomatic negotiations relating to the cession of Songkhla to the French, and finally washed his hands of the matter when Tachard began arguing for Bangkok and Mergui. He

acquired a godson at the Missionary college at Mahapram whom he promised to support financially, but failed to do so. According to Nicholas Gervaise (*L'Histoire du Royaume de Macassar*, Ratisbonne, 1700, p. 105) he also acquired a slave from Toraja:

Three years ago I saw arrive in Siam two Makassarese vessels which were laden with them [prisoners of war made slaves]. The King and Monsieur Constant bought several. The Chevalier de Chaumont, then Ambassador of France to this ruler, took one, and the Abbé de Choisy another, who went with them to Paris. These poor people came from the Province of Toraja which had just been conquered by the King of Makassar.

Neither Chaumont nor Choisy make any mention of acquiring a slave apiece and taking them to Paris. One wonders what their functions were on arrival and what became of them.

5. The second item in the list of presents sent by Narai to Louis XIV is, in the English translation of 1687, "A Basin and Ewer of Tambac, a Metal more esteemed than Gold, which is made at Siam after that Country fashion." Choisy mentions on 30 October 1685 two Buddha statues some two feet high at Wat Sri Sampetch, Ayudhya, "made of a mixture of gold and copper, more brilliant than gold, which is called *tambac*. I do not find this as beautiful as they make out; it is perhaps the *electrum* of Solomon."

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