SECTION III

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
"The king of Siam knows very well how to estimate the power and qualities of the sovereigns who send their ambassadors to him," wrote Father Nicolas Gervaise in 1688:

He receives the envoys of the emperor of China, of the Great Mogul and the Grand Sophy with much more pomp and ceremony than those of neighbouring rulers. As these latter are almost all tributaries of his crown ... inferior to him in wealth and power, he makes sure that they are made aware of the difference between [him] and their own masters ...

But, continued Gervaise, "it is quite otherwise with the ambassadors of emperors and kings who are his equals."

As soon as word is received of their entry into the country, several state balons [i.e., royal barges] are sent to receive them. They bring their letters of credence to the palace themselves and give them to the barcalon [or Phra 'klang, minister of trade and foreign affairs] in the king's presence to be handed to his Majesty. The roads along their way are lined with armed men and richly caparisoned elephants, while mandarins in great numbers dressed in their finest clothes ... accompany them to the audience. The king receives them in his palace and entertains them there magnificently. He never allows them to depart without having made them presents rich enough to give them an exalted idea of his greatness and magnificence.¹

Such was the nature of Siamese diplomacy and protocol in the late seventeenth century, a protocol based upon ancient traditions of dominant powers and client kingdoms in a pattern that prevailed throughout the Far East. How different was the practice in Europe, where the concept of equal sovereign states was taking root and the notion of the balance of power—though not accepted fully until the eighteenth century—was developing. Separately, the two systems worked well within their own environments, where expectations were the same and old habits of procedure were accepted. But when they came into direct contact with each other, as they did increasingly in the seventeenth century because of expanding European interests in the Far East, problems arose on both sides in trying to bridge the cultural gap that divided them. Indeed, as one modern historian of this question observes, foreign relations between Asia and Europe in this period especially must be seen "as contacts on various levels between many features of two cultures, two political and social systems ...": Hence the interest of contemporary Europeans such as Gervaise in Asian protocol, for it was precisely in matters of diplomatic form that Asians and Europeans found their way toward an understanding of each other.

At no time was this interest expressed more extravagantly than in the lavish audience arranged at Versailles on 1 September 1686 by Louis XIV to welcome the three ambassadors of Phra Narai, king of Siam (1658–1688), the "ruler of heaven and earth." Held in the newly finished Hall of Mirrors, it was the most spectacular reception the Sun King ever granted to an embassy during his long reign. But what made it unique, apart from the obvious fact that receiving envoys from an Asian prince was almost without precedent in European diplomatic experience, was the close attention Louis and his protocol officers paid to copying as nearly as possible the outward forms of Siamese court ceremonial. For their purpose was to present the French monarch not as a European prince constrained by fundamental laws and the privileges of corporate bodies, but as an omnipotent Asian despot, equal to Phra Narai in power, wealth, remoteness from his subjects and even personal divinity, to give the Siamese ambassadors "an exalted idea of [Louis’s] greatness and magnificence" according to eastern expectations. At the same time, however, intentionally or not the French king also impressed his own courtiers—who were conditioned to such symbolism—with a theatrical display of royal absolutism that...
went so far beyond European precepts that some, such as the marquis d'Argenson, would allude to it when criticizing Louis after his death for having "raised his court on a foundation of Asiatic luxury which he could not sustain."  

**INITIAL CONTACTS**

Ever since 1664 when Jean-Baptiste Colbert chartered the Compagnie des Indes Orientales with royal backing, the Bourbon Crown had been seeking ways to establish France as a great commercial, political and military power in the Far East, in direct challenge to Dutch hegemony. But when early initiatives in Madagascar and the Indian Ocean failed miserably over the next two decades to achieve results, French attention shifted to the strategic kingdom of Siam. There, Phra Narai—who was eager to make his realm known and recognized abroad—that the strategic kingdom of Siam. There, Phra Narai—who was eager to make his realm known and recognized abroad—already had taken some tentative steps toward opening diplomatic relations with the Sun King, whose reputation (it was claimed) was "esteemed throughout the world and, even in the Indies, feared by those who would lord it over other rulers." Meantime, French policy had received a further incentive in the form of assurances from the Apostolic fathers of the Missions Étrangères (active in Siam since 1662) that the Asian monarch was ready to convert to Christianity, having misinterpreted—or perhaps misrepresented—his benevolence toward them as a sign of his desire to embrace their faith.

Encouraged by these prospects for success, Louis XIV sent the first of two French embassies to Southeast Asia in March 1685. Led by the pious chevalier de Chaumont (who was described by his more colorful coadjutor, the abbé de Choisy, as "more of a missionary" than the six Jesuits who sailed with him), it failed to achieve its primary goal of converting Phra Narai as anticipated, though two treaties were signed in December giving extensive privileges to the Compagnie des Indes Orientales and protection to native converts to Catholicism. Otherwise, much of the significance of this embassy lay in the fact that the chevalier and other members of his entourage provided the French Crown with its first full descriptions of Siamese court ceremonial. It was these accounts, combined with verbal reports and other written memoranda, that were then used by Louis and his advisers to plan the audience held in September 1686 for Phra Narai's ambassadors, who had returned with Chaumont to France.

Hitherto, the only substantial narrations of Siamese protocol available at Versailles had been written in 1673 by François Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, who had presented letters from Louis XIV and Pope Clement IX to the Asian monarch, thanking him for his generous treatment of the French priests in Siam. In a relation to his superiors in Paris, as well as in separate dispatches to the Sun King and Colbert, Pallu had told how the two missions had been received "with all the esteem of which this court is capable," describing in some detail the elaborate etiquette of his audience with Phra Narai. He also had noted the changes in ceremonial that he and his fellow prelate, the bishop of Bérythe, had secured after four months of heated negotia-

tion on the arrogant claim that certain Siamese customs—such as the compulsory act of the krāp, or prostration with the triple salutation of the t'ai before the king "from which even ambassadors are not exempt"—were deprecating to "the honour of the [Christian] religion, the dignity of their persons, and the reputation of France ... " Doubtless, Pallu confirmed these accounts of his experiences in Siam when, after a series of misadventures, he returned briefly to Europe three years later.

It appears, however, that the bishop's descriptions of Siamese protocol went largely unnoticed at Versailles, if for no other reason than relations between the two kingdoms were still very tentative. But this began to change in late 1680 when news arrived that Phra Narai had sent an embassy to France aboard the East India Company vessel Soleil d'Orient, inspired by reports of Louis XIV's recent victories over the Dutch to conclude an alliance of perpetual friendship with his fellow monarch whom, he reportedly declared, "deserves to be king over all the kings of Europe." In order to prepare the French court to receive the Siamese ambassadors with appropriate courtesy, their chaperon, Father Gayme of the Missions Étrangères, wrote ahead to explain some finer points of Asian etiquette, adding that the three envoys would salute the king à la mode de Siam. About the same time, André Deslandes-Bourreau of the Compagnie des Indes Orientales (who had been posted briefly to Siam in 1682) and Mgr. Pallu (who had returned to that kingdom the same year, bearing a second missive from Louis XIV to Phra Narai) forwarded some additional details, noting, for example, that the presentation of gifts was an essential feature of Asian embassies, though it was not the practice in Europe. Yet, ignorance of Siam and its culture—let alone its ceremonial—was still so rife at the French court at this date that the geographer Claude de l'Isle felt compelled to write a relation of the kingdom, which he based upon every published source he could find. But his efforts were rendered ineffectual when the Siamese embassy failed to arrive, having perished in a storm off the coast of Madagascar.

**THE SECOND SIAMESE MISSION**

Unlike Pallu's reports of 1673, however, it appears that the dispatches he, Deslandes-Bourreau and the ill-fated Father Gayme had forwarded to France between 1680 and 1682 had been read carefully at Versailles. For in March 1684, when two Siamese mandarins arrived almost unexpectedly at Calais to enquire into the fate of their missing countrymen and to request that French envoys be sent to Siam with powers to negotiate a treaty of trade and alliance, the recommendations of the three men were followed to the letter. Immediately, the marquis de Seignelay—who had succeeded his late father Colbert (d. 1683) as minister of the Marine with particular responsibility for this matter—dispatched a maître d'hôtel to receive the mandarins with full honors and to conduct them to Paris, where they were lodged and feted lavishly. As for their expenses, all of these were paid for by the French Crown in accordance with royal custom in Siam. Furthermore, that Seignelay was aware of
individual details of Siamese protocol, such as the act of prostration, is evident from the preparations ordered for his own reception of the Asian envoys on the morning of 27 October. Specifically, a large Turkish rug was spread on the floor of his cabinet, on which they performed their salutations. Although Mgr. Pallu had reported sitting on just such a carpet during his audiences with Phra Narai in 1673 and 1682, it is far more likely that the marquis had been advised of this practice by Father Bénigne Vachet, who had accompanied the mandarins to France at the request of the king of Siam not only as their interpreter, but also as his special messenger.

Yet, in spite of these efforts to emulate some of the mechanics of Asian diplomacy, it is clear from subsequent events that the French court lacked sufficient background to comprehend the deep cultural implications of Siamese protocol for the unparalleled position of Asian despotism, or its subtle reflection of social divisions. As a result, misunderstandings developed almost immediately between the visiting envoys and their European hosts. The mandarins were shocked, for example, by the apparent lack of reverence shown to Louis XIV, whom they first met informally in the Hall of Mirrors on the afternoon of 27 October. Recalled Father Vachet:

Our Siamese, who were accustomed to the profound respect and great silence that one keeps in the presence of their king, were extraordinarily surprised to hear a confused murmuring [from the attendant crowd of courtiers], and to see how everyone pushed forward to draw nearer to the person of the prince; some in front, others behind, but the majority at his sides …

This cannot have left a good impression on the two envoys, whose own monarch was so revered by his subjects that, on the rare occasions he showed himself in public, they were not permitted even to look at him, yet alone pronounce his name. But if the mandarins were surprised by this bewildering display of royal familiarity so contrary to Siamese custom, Louis XIV found himself equally perplexed when they prostrated themselves before him "in the manner I have seen them do before the king of Siam," wrote Father Vachet. Asking if they would like to stand up, the astonished monarch had to be told by the French priest—with whom he had had one or two lengthy interviews already about Siam, though it appears the subject of the language and customs of France as the French were of Europe in spring 1686 bringing with them not only three new

honourable" because of the cultural significance of keeping the top of one's head—where the khiun (i.e., "spirit essence" or, loosely, the soul) resided—higher than that of one's social inferiors. Consequently, when the two Asians tried to place themselves further up the bleachers "so that no one could sit over their head," their French attendants misunderstood their intention and attempted to re-seat them in accordance with the king's express commands. The result was an unfortunate faux pas. Thinking themselves gravely offended, the mandarins stormed out of the theater before Louis could arrive to begin the opera, declining ever again to expose themselves to such treatment "despite all the remonstrances, advice and threats that [Father Vachet] made them." Infuriated by the incident, the French king vowed to punish those responsible for it, while his brother the duc d'Orléans and the exasperated Vachet discussed ways of avoiding such embarrassments in future. But soon afterward, the French felt insulted in their turn when the two Asians refused to genuflect at the elevation of the host during a mass celebrated for the opening of the 'parlement de Paris', because it did not fit their cultural patterns.

Perhaps the major contributor to this problem of mutual misunderstanding was the simple fact that the mandarins lacked ambassadorial status, being mere officiers of the maison du Roi de Siam who carried no letters to Louis XIV from Phra Narai, because the latter thought it inappropriate to send a new embassy to France until the fate of the first one had been discovered. As a result, the deeper implications of Siamese protocol never were addressed at Versailles, where little real effort was made to accommodate the cultural expectations of the two envoys beyond certain superficialities and ad hoc measures; for without official standing they were not entitled to the kind of consideration ambassadors of foreign monarchs generally received. Furthermore, because the mandarins were as ignorant of the language and customs of France as the French were of almost anything Siamese, it was very difficult for either party to overcome the ill-effects of their culture shock. Nor did it help matters that Father Vachet—who had been given "such great authority over [the two envoys] that ... [if] they gave [the priest] any cause to complain, [Phra Narai] would take their life on their return to Asia"—treated his wards with scant regard, even handling the official business of the mission without their participation. Thus reduced to mere objects of curiosity to the French court, where "novelty ... rendered them interesting," the two men increasingly avoided their hosts, whose every misstep of protocol they viewed as a personal affront. Meanwhile, the French—including Vachet—dismissed their guests' behavior as mere "boorishness," the result of "un goût dépravé."

THE CHAUMONT MISSION

How different was the treatment given the third Siamese embassy to France two years later, when Versailles was far better prepared to receive it. For in the meantime, Louis XIV had sent his own ambassadors to Phra Narai, who had returned to Europe in spring 1686 bringing with them not only three new
envoys from the Asian monarch, but also detailed accounts of Siamese court ceremonial that were used by the French king and his ministers to prepare for the mandarins' first audience with Louis on the following 1 September. According to the royal master of ceremonies, M. de Saintctot, there had been much discussion of, and even some opposition to, the proposal of sending a French embassy to Siam. But what finally had convinced the king and his council to open direct contact with Phra Narai was Father Vachet's overconfident assurances—"exaggerated beyond all reality"—that the Siamese monarch was on the verge of embracing Catholicism, and that all he needed to take the decisive step was a personal invitation from Louis XIV to convert "as the best means to be united in this world and the next." Then, Vachet had alleged, the Siamese "people would follow his example and perhaps [even] the neighbouring kings" who were his tributaries. The double lure of challenging the Dutch East India Company in the Far East and of establishing French trade securely by means of a political and commercial alliance with Siam was offered as a further incentive.

Thus inspired by visions of the "glory that would accrue to [him], and the merit before God, for having undertaken so noble a task"—especially at a time when Louis's credit in Europe was so low for having encouraged the Ottoman Turks to besiege Vienna in 1683 while he had used the crisis to seize pockets of territory along the Rhine—the Sun king appointed the chevalier de Chaumont as his ambassador to Siam on 15 December 1684. A recent Huguenot convert to Catholicism whose deep piety was well-known, Chaumont was the ideal choice to exhort [Phra Narai] ... to embrace the [Christian] religion and the one true God whom his Majesty recognizes himself ... His dual rank as naval captain and major general in the French squadron of the Levant was another advantage, as it increased his dignity and gave him full command of the two warships that carried his embassy to Southeast Asia. At the same time, the abbé de Choisy was named coadjutor in the event of Chaumont's untimely death on the outward voyage, but with specific instructions to remain in Siam to baptize Phra Narai should he agree to convert. Partly for this reason, Choisy was directed by Chaumont to learn the native language, as "it would be very advantageous to negotiate with the king ... face to face, without an interpreter." Finally, the ambassador was provided with a suitable retinue of twelve young gentlemen "to increase the majesty of his embassy" (among whom was the chevalier de Forbin), six Jesuits commissioned as "the King's Mathematicians" to lend greater prestige to their missionary work and scientific studies; several agents of the Compagnie des Indes Orientales; a variety of servants, musicians, equerries and valets de chambre; and a cargo of rich presents for the Siamese monarch in accordance with Asian diplomatic custom.

After a voyage lasting fully half a year, the tiny French squadron anchored off the bar of Siam on 23 September 1685. No sooner had he been informed of its arrival by Father Vachet (who, together with Forbin, had been dispatched to the court for that purpose) than Phra Narai ordered preparations to receive Louis XIV's chief ambassador with extraordinary honors. By all accounts, the Siamese monarch planned to entertain the chevalier de Chaumont magnificently and, "upon pain of [Phra Narai's] displeasure, ... [to shew him all the Honour that he who represented the person of a great Prince deserved, and that they should not stand upon the Ceremonies and Customs that were observed in the reception of other Ambassadors.

Accordingly, on 29 September the chevalier and his suite were greeted aboard ship à la Siamoise by two mandarins with an impressive retinue of forty men, who had been sent expressly by Phra Narai to congratulate the French envoy on his arrival, to compliment him on Louis XIV's good health and many victories over France's enemies, and to assure him that the royal astrologers had been assembled to determine "the luckiest day of the Year to be pitched upon for his [official] Reception" at court. At the same time, arrangements were begun for the ambassador's ascent by slow stages up the Menam Chao Praya to the old royal capital of Ayudhya, called the "Venice of the East" by contemporary European visitors because of its many canals and waterways. Specifically, rest-houses (the construction of which was said to have employed 20,000 workers) were built at distances of fifteen miles along the river banks from its mouth to the capital, where Chaumont and his suite were to stop for meals or pass the night. Each place was staffed by two opras or osas (translated usually as marshals, dukes or peers), seven officers of Phra Narai's household and a body of Siamese troops who patrolled constantly to prevent "noise and disorder." Dinner was served everyday in European style for at least thirty guests. As a special mark of distinction, the rest-houses were painted red—"a very singular honour," observed the French—to indicate that the ambassador was to be "treated as [the king of Siam's] own person, there being only the Royal Houses of that colour." Finally, a large residence was built a league or two down river from Ayudhya, at Wat Proe Saht, where the whole party was to be lodged until Chaumont's first audience with the king. After that, the ambassador and his retinue would be moved into "the fairest and most commodious house of the Town" for the remainder of their stay in Siam.

Thus even before 8 October, when the French began their stately journey by water to Ayudhya, an elaborate protocol was observed that deliberately surpassed in splendor the ceremonial customarily used in Siam, as Nicolas Gervaise would describe it three years later. As many as sixty-six royal balois awaited Chaumont and his party at the mouth of the Menam Chao Phraya. A particularly splendid vessel, "all over gilt, threscore and twelve feet long, and rowed by seventy handsome men, with Oars covered in Plates of Silver," was reserved for the ambassador, Choisy and the bishop of Mételopolis. "A Portugese whom the King [of Siam] had made General of the Troops in Bangkok" (probably a mestizo) also attended Chaumont as a special courtesy "[to] give orders for all things." As well, four ornate barges were appointed to carry the various members of the French entourage, while in two columns on
either side of the chevalier's balon the barges of twelve court mandarins—arranged "en bataille"—served as an escort. As the flotilla entered the river, it was joined by the chief nobles of the district and, the next day, by the governors of Bangkok and Phetchaburi with their respective retinues.

Although enchanted by the natural beauties of Siam and the pageantry of native life along the river, what most impressed the French was the extraordinary ceremonial with which Chaumont was greeted at every stage of his voyage, it being

... the King of Siam's pleasure, that the Ambassador of the King of France, should be treated with marks of distinction from all others, and even from those of the Emperor of China, who all over the East is reckoned the greatest Monarch of the Universe.

In addition to the lavish favors outlined above, he was paid the kind of respect, even reverence, that was reserved exclusively for Phra Narai. "I had the same honours shewed me," reported the chevalier, "as to the King [of Siam] when he is wont to pass on the River."

I could see no body in the houses [along the banks], all people were in Barges, or on the sides of the River, lying flat on their Bellies, and their hands joyned against their foreheads. They reverence in such manner their Prince, that they dare not lift up their eyes to look at him.

At first, Chaumont was as puzzled by this foreign display of esteem as Louis XIV had been astonished by the elaborate ceremonial with which Phra Narai was received. While the French were certain that the majesty of the French king should be accorded to no one, they found the Asian monarch's courtiers' treatment of the French envoy highly offensive.

"They dare not lift up their eyes to look at him," reported the chevalier, "as to the King [of Siam] when he is wont to pass on the River." This treatment was a clear indication of the King of France's superior status to that of the ruler of Siam. However, Chaumont was also eager to accommodate his prospective host. His visit marked the first time that a Western envoy had been granted such a high level of respect in Siam.

The French found Siamese protocol either so deprecating to their Gallic sense of honor that the envoy and his retinue at first refused any compromise on ceremony; or so ridiculous that the twelve gentlemen in Chaumont's suite laughed aloud, for example, at the sight of serried ranks of mandarins performing the krâp before their monarch, "with their beehive hats [i.e., conical bonnets worn on official occasions] as a distinction of rank" pointed out each other's ass.

Thanks to Siamese flexibility, however, the two parties quickly resolved at least the lesser details of protocol to be observed on 18 October. It was agreed, for instance, that Chaumont would wear his shoes, stockings and sword during the audience (the custom being to appear barefoot and unarmed before the sovereign); that he would make his reverence in the European fashion rather than by the ritual prostration traditionally required of envoys; and that he would begin his compliments standing erect instead of sitting on a carpet, though he had to continue his address seated on a chair, but wearing his hat.

(Ironically, Chaumont exceeded his orders here, which had instructed him only to salute the Asian monarch "in the French fashion," and to obtain permission to remain seated on cushions on the floor for the duration of the audience.) Far more difficult to settle, however, was the very sensitive issue of the manner in which Louis XIV's letter was to be presented. For the chevalier insisted on handing this directly to Phra Narai as in Europe—a "pretention," noted the chevalier de Forbin, that "clashed absolutely with the practices of the kings of Siam," as well as with Asian concepts of monarchical dignity in which consisted "the principal grandeur of their sovereign power ..."

What Chaumont failed to understand, or perhaps refused to accept, was that the far eastern view of embassies was very different from that obtaining in Europe, and more specifically that the center-piece—indeed, the essential purpose of the first audience in Siam—was the presentation of royal letters sent by a foreign prince to the Thai monarch. This was seen as a form of homage or tribute paid by an inferior. For that reason, an envoy received little deference himself "in comparison of the respects which are render'd to the Letters of Credence of which he is Bearer," because an "Ambassador throughout the East is [regarded as] no other than a King's Messenger: he represents
not his master." By contrast, the letters he delivered on behalf of his sovereign were accorded "the same honours as [the Siamese] would give to the princes who have written them; [as] if they themselves were present." For such documents were "looked upon as the Royal Word," an extension of the monarch's own person that came directly from his own hand and contained his own thoughts. The physical character of the letter further symbolized this perception: those sent by Phra Narai to his fellow rulers, including Louis XIV, were inscribed in red ink on sheets of gold "as thin as a Leaf of Paper." They then were wrapped in layers of silk and enshrined in a set of finely wrought caskets of precious metals and lacquered wood for safe transport.

Only after three days of intense negotiation did the two sides finally reach a compromise first suggested by the abbé de Choisy, who had urged his superior to be more flexible seeing that "the customs of these countries are so different from ours that at each moment it was necessary to pause." Chaumont would be permitted to present the Sun King's letter to Phra Narai after all, but not hand to hand as he originally had wanted. Instead, the royal brief was to be placed on a golden saucer affixed to a long wand also of gold, which the French envoy was to carry to the audience. To facilitate his presentation still further, it was agreed that three small steps would be placed beneath the elevated throne window in the great hall of the palace complex at which the Siamese king always appeared for official events, to permit Chaumont to mount just under the base of the dais. Then gripping the bottom of the wand, he would lift the saucer over his head by slightly extending his elbow, at which point Phra Narai would take Louis XIV's letter without having to reach down or stoop to accept it. The advantage of this arrangement was twofold: it allowed the chevalier to present the royal brief almost directly to the Asian monarch as he had wanted, thus satisfying his European sense of dignity, while at the same time it preserved the outward forms of Siamese court ceremonial.

Everything was now in readiness for the audience, and at seven A.M. on 18 October forty mandarins, led by two çonas, arrived at the sumptuous lodgings of the French ambassador to escort him to Ayudhya. Entering the chevalier's presence, the mandarins immediately prostrated themselves according to ancient rite, performing the wai first to the protective gold casket containing Louis's missive and then to Chaumont himself. This ceremony completed, the ambassador rose from his armchair, handed the box and its contents to his coadjutor, the abbé de Choisy, and walked outside to the water's edge where the royal epistle was placed atop the elegant chirolet of a richly gilded "balon of the Body" for the short voyage up river. Flanking this craft were several other barges containing Louis XIV's presents to Phra Narai and a guard of honour. Next, Chaumont, Choisy and the twelve gentlemen of the ambassador's suite boarded separate balons behind the royal barque in accordance with their rank and importance. These were followed in turn by the various functionaries of the chevalier's household, wearing his livery. Altogether, over 200 craft "shining and covered with gold" made up the glittering flotilla, which was saluted at Ayudhya with artillery.

Disembarking at the Siamese capital, the casket containing Louis XIV's letter was transferred to a "great golden Chariot which onely the King rode in" for the procession to the palace gates. Chaumont, Choisy and the bishop of Mételopoiles were carried behind it on three richly decorated palanquins, "painted Red, and adorned with Ivory." "I have never found myself in such state," joked the abbé, "and I thought for a moment that I was the pope!" Chaumont's suite of French gentlemen followed on horseback, while the rest of his attendants walked toward the rear. Escorted by richly caparisoned war elephants and a host of finely clothed mandarins, this impressive cortège marched to the palace along a road "as long and much straighter than the rue St. Honore" to the sound of trumpets, drums, pipes, bells and horns, "which Musick made a pleasant noise." Lining its route were double files of armed soldiers, uniformly dressed in gilt metal helmets, red tunics and the customary panung (or swaddling loincloth). Behind them watched an "incredible Multzitude of People" in "profound silence," who performed "the Zombaye" as soon as the chariot carrying the royal letter appeared.

At the entrance to the palace, the French ambassador and his suite proceeded on foot "in a grave and stately manner" through a succession of five large courtyards, each lined with rank upon rank of royal guards also clad in red, who sat cross-legged "with the Butt-end of their Musquets to the ground standing up-right." For "in the King's Palace no Man is suffered to be up upon his Legs, unless he be going, and all the Siam Soldiers were squatted upon the Tail [therefore]...." This [was] quite pretty to the sight," recalled Choisy, adding with an air of European superiority that "I frankly believe fifty [French] musketeers easily could defeat them." As a special favor, the envos were permitted to see Phra Narai's white elephant, the most revered of all animals and the sacred symbol of Siamese monarchy, as well as the "Prince elephant"—"the largest and most spiritual [in the royal stables]... on which the King rides." Reaching the final courtyard, Chaumont and his suite found "a great number of Mandarins ... prostrate on the ground," along with 200 soldiers of Phra Narai's lifeguard clad in royal red like the other troops, whom the first Portuguese visitors to Siam had dubbed Os Braços Pintados ("the Red–Arms") because of the scarlet hue of their tattooed forearms.

At this point, the ambassador paused at the foot of the staircase leading up to the audience hall to permit his retinue to enter first "in the French manner, with their shoes on," before Phra Narai appeared at his elevated dais. They took their position just behind the low seat reserved for Chaumont, between neat rows of high-ranking mandarins who knelt on either side. Sitting cross-legged on Persian carpets, the Europeans were to reverence the Siamese king à la francaise without standing up. The audience chamber itself was rectangular in shape, richly carpeted and exquisitely painted "with flowers of Gold from the top to the bottom." At the far end was the curtained throne window, raised about nine feet from the floor and flanked on either side by ceremonial parasols (called suppathon) made of cloth of gold, each several tiers high, which were additional emblems of Siamese monarchy. The bishop
of Mételropolis, the abbé de Lionne\textsuperscript{132} and Father Vachet also took their places at this time, sitting on the ground like their countrymen, but on either side of Chaumont's stool. When everything was ready "a great noise of trumpets and drums was heard," signaling the arrival of Phra Narai himself, at which point the assembled mandarins immediately performed the kräp to the crude amusement of their European guests.\textsuperscript{136}

Parting the curtains of his throne window, the king appeared, towering above his court in near—fabulous Asian splendor. On his head, noted the French in intimate detail, he wore a conical tiara, "all shining with precious Stones" and encompassed with three gold bands at regular intervals, while his fingers sparkled with clusters of diamond rings "that cast a great Luster." His underclothing was the color "of fire and gold," being made "of very rich flowered Stuff ... and embroider'd at the Neck and Sleeves with Diamonds," over which he wore a robe also of cloth of gold that used still larger diamonds for buttons.\textsuperscript{137} "All of these Ornaments," wrote Father Tachard, "together with a brisk Air, full of Life, and always smiling, made him look with a great deal of Gracefulness and Majesty."\textsuperscript{138} No sooner was Chaumont alerted by the ceremonial fanfare that Phra Narai had appeared, than he too entered the hall, followed by the abbé de Choisy with Louis XIV's letter, which had been transferred meantime from its protective casings to the golden saucer and wand.\textsuperscript{139}

Advancing four paces "and looking [directly] upon the King," Chaumont made a profound reverence, which he repeated a second time in the center of the chamber and a third time when he had reached his appointed seat, thus performing an amended form of the wai (as opposed to the customary kräp) in accordance with Siamese protocol. Phra Narai "answered every Bow he made by an Inclination of Body, which he accompanied with a serene and smiling Countenance."\textsuperscript{140} The ambassador then began his address to the king.\textsuperscript{141} At the second word he covered his head and took his seat as prearranged, only raising his hat when he spoke of the two monarchs.\textsuperscript{142} So far, everything had unfolded according to plan. After the interpretation of Chaumont's address, however, a potentially disastrous diplomatic scene was averted narrowly when the ambassador presented Louis XIV's letter to Phra Narai.\textsuperscript{143}

The problem was that the three steps that should have been placed beneath the throne window as previously arranged were missing, probably by design to humble the ambassador.\textsuperscript{144} For in order to give the Sun King's missive to the Asian monarch, the surprised Chaumont presumably would have to hold the wand of the golden saucer at its base and raise his arm very high to reach the level of Phra Narai. Thinking, however, "that that Distance suited not with his Dignity,"\textsuperscript{145} the chevalier refused to "give the [Siamese] King my Letter in this manner."\textsuperscript{146} Choisy even thought of moving the ambassador's stool beneath the throne window so that he could climb on it, instead. But before he could act Chaumont advanced boldly toward the royal dais, holding the wand just under the saucer and, without raising his arm or extending his elbow, he offered Louis's letter to Phra Narai as if they had been standing on the same level. This obliged the Siamese monarch to stoop down "in such a manner as one might see his whole Body" to take up the brief.\textsuperscript{147} Yet he did so with great tact, smiling and laughing all the while, "thereby showing a grace which seems to contrast favourably with the gauche manner of the ambassador."\textsuperscript{148} Perhaps he was amused by the Frenchman's impudence. Whatever his thoughts, the king then raised the letter as high as his head, which "was the greatest honour he could have rendered it,"\textsuperscript{149} whereupon Chaumont made another deep reverence to his royal host and returned to his seat.

The ambassador subsequently claimed credit for having upheld the honour and dignity of Louis XIV in this way,\textsuperscript{150} and on returning to Paris he allowed prints to be engraved and circulated, depicting the event.\textsuperscript{151} But probably it was only Phra Narai's good humor on this occasion, combined with his express commands "to do the impossible to honour the Ambassador of France," that prevented Chaumont's arrogant affront from becoming an ugly diplomatic incident with potentially ruinous consequences. This certainly appears to have been Choisy's view of the whole episode.\textsuperscript{152} In any case, Phra Narai's indulgence ensured that the rest of the reception proceeded without further incident, as the Asian king and his European guest exchanged civilities for about an hour until trumpets sounded to mark the close of the audience. The curtains then were drawn across the throne window, screening Phra Narai from further view. After a sumptuous lunch the French embassy was conducted from the palace to its new lodgings in Ayudhya with the same pomp and in the same order as it had arrived.\textsuperscript{153}

Although Chaumont subsequently secured a draft treaty (signed on 19 December) with extensive commercial concessions for the Compagnie des Indes Orientales and protection for Siamese converts to Catholicism, his embassy did not achieve its primary objective of converting the king. In fact, hardly had his small squadron anchored off the Bar of Siam on 23 September than the chevalier had discovered that everything the French court had been led to believe about Phra Narai's personal disposition toward Christianity had been exaggerated, and that he had no intention of embracing the faith.\textsuperscript{154} Nor did any of Chaumont's subsequent exhortations "to live ... in the same Opinions and Beliefs" with Louis XIV as the surest means of cementing "an Union between the two Crowns" persuade the Siamese monarch to the contrary.\textsuperscript{155} Thus, the mission was largely a failure. Nevertheless, direct contact had been opened between the two courts at the official level, and when Chaumont sailed for France on 22 December he took with him the members of Phra Narai's third embassy to Versailles,\textsuperscript{156} whose purpose was to request a firm treaty of alliance with Louis XIV and to ask also that a small body of soldiers be sent to Siam as a special honour guard for the king.\textsuperscript{157}

\textbf{The Third Siamese Mission}

This time the French court was well prepared to receive the Asian envoys and their suite, whose arrival had been anticipated since the previous year. In addition to reviewing carefully the original reports of Deslandes–Bourreau, Mgr. Pallu and

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Father Gayme, Louis XIV and his protocol officers had learned much from their errors of 1684 and had shaped their preliminary arrangements accordingly. They now had access, as well, to a trove of information on Siamese court ceremonial in the comprehensive relations later published by various members of the returning French legation, which they used in manuscript form to plan every detail of the forthcoming reception. It was Louis's habit, after all, developed over years of experience, to base his foreign policy decisions "on all reports ... that may have some bearing on the matter" at hand.\textsuperscript{156}

In fact, hardly had Chaumont's ships anchored at Brest on the evening of 18 June 1686 than he and Choisy proceeded to Versailles, where—surrounded by curious courtiers "like bears"\textsuperscript{159}—they were questioned extensively by the king. He appears to have been especially interested in the lavish treatment they had received from the moment of their arrival in Siam to their first audience with Phra Narai. For it was the intention of Louis and his ministers to recreate detail for detail the ceremonial observed at Chaumont's reception, using French equivalents for Siamese forms, in greeting the Asian monarch's new embassy to France. This is evident not only from the preparations already planned to welcome the three ambassadors, and the speed with which these arrangements were carried out once they had arrived. It also is clear from a separate memorandum written by the chevalier at the king's request, in which he specified the distinctions to be granted the new envoys and their suite if Versailles were to mirror exactly the honours he had been paid at Siam.\textsuperscript{160} What is more, Chaumont's recommendations were followed to the letter. Significantly, after all the misunderstandings and mistakes committed on both sides during the visit of the first two mandarins to France in 1684, Louis XIV and his advisers had become far more attentive to Siamese cultural and diplomatic patterns, even if the full implications of these patterns still eluded them. They were also determined to avoid any faux pas that could mar the reception of the new embassy or spoil the exalted impression of the French monarch that they wanted to create.

Hence, no sooner had the Siamese ambassadors reached Brest on 18 June than they were welcomed with Asian—style pomp by their European hosts. That evening they were met aboard ship by a large party of royal officers and Breton noblemen, led by the governor of the port and the local intendant de la marine, who complemented them on their arrival exactly as Chaumont had been welcomed at the Bar of Siam a year before. The next day, they were saluted by more than sixty volleys of cannon fired from the citadel and all naval vessels then in port, as they were taken ashore in a "balon de state," improvised overnight from a ship's launch or galiot rowed by fifty sailors, decorated brightly with cloth of gold and hundreds of white satin pennants, and provided even with musicians to play music for the occasion. Between sixty and eighty smaller craft similarly adorned conveyed the lesser members of the embassy to the wharf just as the minor functionaries of Chaumont's suite had been transported at the mouth of the Menam Chao Phraya.\textsuperscript{161} On shore, the envoys were greeted by the leading dignitaries of the port, who escorted them between double ranks of regular troops and militiamen to their temporary lodgings. There, they were entertained with banquets,\textsuperscript{162} tours and visits to warships—such as the impressive Soleil Royal—"that surpass all others in grandeur, sculpture and gilding," until the arrival in early July of the sieur Storff, a gentleman ordinary of the chambre du roy appointed by Louis XIV to supply their needs whilst in France, in the same way that Chaumont had been attended by a Portuguese mestizo in Phra Narai's service as a special courtesy "to give orders for all things."\textsuperscript{163}

Meanwhile, detailed preparations were made for the ambassadors' trip overland to Paris via the Loire Valley, a route selected by Louis himself no doubt to impress upon his Asian visitors the beauty, breadth, wealth and power of his realm.\textsuperscript{164} In addition to arranging transportation by public or private conveyance at every stage of the journey,\textsuperscript{165} the embassy's baggage—including the royal gifts,\textsuperscript{166} in all about 332 large crates—was sent by sea to Le Havre and thence up the Seine River to the French capital.\textsuperscript{167} Orders also were given to provide furnishings from the royal household for the chateau de Berny, just two leagues outside Paris, where the Siamese ambassadors were to lodge until their official entry into the city.\textsuperscript{168} After that, they would be moved into the former Hôtel du maréchal d'Ancre-Concini on the rue du Tournon, owned by the Crown but only recently refurbished and renamed the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires.\textsuperscript{169}

At the same time, explicit instructions were issued from Versailles to render the mandarins and their suite extraordinary honours en route,\textsuperscript{170} according to Chaumont's recommendations. At each town through which they passed, the envoys were to be saluted at the gates with artillery and greeted by the governor, intendant and municipal officials, distinctions reserved customarily for crowned heads and sovereign princes.\textsuperscript{171} A company of bourgeois militia also was to guard the lodgings appointed for the mandarins' use when stopping for meals or spending the night (the French equivalent of Siamese "rest-houses"), while the provincial governors and lieutenants—general were instructed to assist the sieur Storff in providing for the ambassadors' needs when passing through their jurisdictions. A special blazon for Siam (consisting of a white elephant on a field of blue, the royal color in Europe)\textsuperscript{172} even was improvised by Versailles to lend still greater dignity to the embassy. Its costs, meantime, were to be paid by the French Crown, since it is [now] an established principle that all ambassadors sent by rulers whose realms lie outside Europe shall be treated as guests, at the King's expense, during their stay in the kingdom.\textsuperscript{173}

Finally, every effort was made by the court authorities to adapt French protocol to the requirements of Siamese cultural patterns. For example, "as it was necessary that the letter [they brought for Louis XIV from] the king their master be more elevated than they," explained Sainctot, arrangements were made to suspend it high overhead in every house the envoys stayed;\textsuperscript{174} a special shelf also was attached to the ceiling of the carriage in which the chief ambassador rode from Brest to Paris.
for that reason. As for their customs of placing fresh flowers daily on the casket containing the royal epistle and of performing the \textit{uai} whenever passing before it—rituals that might have been viewed as either quaint or excessively elaborate in 1684—Sainctot now observed that "this respect should not seem extraordinary, for all the old courtiers during my youth saluted the king's bed on entering his chamber; ... several ladies of the old court still do." 

Thus, even before 9 July, when the Siamese began their stately journey overland to Paris, an extravagant protocol—modeled after the descriptions of Chaumont, Choisy, Tachard and other members of the former French embassy—was observed that deliberately surpassed in splendor the ceremonial customarily used in France. According to Father Vachet, the envoys were met with great \textit{éclat} at every place they stopped along their route:

The inhabitants formed a guard of honour at the gates in advance of their arrival. Cannons were fired in salute at every town that had them, while the civic magistrates welcomed [the Siamese] with speeches and gave them presents. The higher courts also sent delegations. The local chapter-houses, curés, superiors of convents and monasteries all came to complement [the mandarins] on their arrival, while the leading ladies were permitted to watch them dine. In a word, everyone, important or not, appeared to take an active role in their reception with great enthusiasm.

Nor did the French have any reason to complain, this time, of their Asian guests' behavior, thanks largely to the foresight of Phra Narai. Wanting also to avoid the embarrassments of 1684, he had directed Vachet and the abbé de Lionne (who accompanied the new ambassadors as interpreters) "to teach them European customs and manners" during the outward voyage, these "being very different from his kingdom's." He had enlisted Chaumont's help to this end, as well. Consequently, the three mandarins were so familiar with French ceremonial by the time they reached Brest that they easily conformed to customs that were completely alien or even opposed to Siamese practice, such as the tactile welcome they received from the leading women of the port—" ... the first time in their life," noted an amused Vachet, "that the ... ambassadors had the honour of kissing foreign ladies on the cheek for which, to avoid any unpleasant surprises, we had forewarned them." Similarly, Kōsa Pān, the principal envoy, was versed well enough in French protocol as to play skillfully upon the imagery surrounding Louis XIV who, he once wrote, "brightens all the world like the Sun ... " Not surprisingly, therefore, the three men were praised effusively by their Gallic hosts as "the best natured People in the World, very easy and obliging, [and] good humoured," whose conduct was "diametrically opposed ... to the first two mandarins who gave [us] so much trouble."

On 30 July the ambassadors finally reached Berny after a journey lasting just over three weeks, having been "feted and treated magnificently" all the way. Thirteen days later, on 12 August, they made their formal entry into Paris at the head of a long procession of sixty carriages (riding in those of the king and other members of the royal family), escorted by a host of royal officials, courtiers, mounted trumpeters and various units of the \textit{Maison du Roi} in obvious imitation of the waterborne cortege by which Chaumont had entered Ayudhaya. From the Porte St. Antoine, the procession moved slowly through the city center, along streets lined with soldiers of the \textit{Gardes Françaises}, to the \textit{Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires} where the mandarins were entertained once again on a lavish scale. Three weeks later, on 1 September, they were taken to Versailles for their first audience with Louis XIV.

This time there were no disputes or missteps over protocol, which emulated in every detail the ceremonial accorded to Chaumont in Siam, but with particular attention to creating a visual image of the French monarch as an Asian-style despot, the equal of Phra Narai in omnipotence, remoteness from his subjects and even quasi-divinity, according to eastern expectations. Louis and his advisers were acutely aware of the nature and extent of the Siamese king's authority. Described as an autocrat with the power of life and death over his subjects (who themselves seemed little better than slaves to western observers), Phra Narai was "a most absolute Prince, and a Man may say him [even] to be the \textit{Siames God}." For he was accorded "such honours as are usually deemed to be due only to God—an expression of reverence, even "adoration" that was more "becoming a celestial Deity, than an earthly Majesty." This image of his near divinity was augmented still further by the elaborate ritual of his court and by the fact that he showed himself in public only twice a year, and then with as much ceremony as possible. Called variously the "king of kings," "lord of lords," "lord of the waters" and the "ruler of heaven and earth" among other titles (although, noted the well-travelled Tavernier, "he is a tributary of the Kings of China"), Phra Narai was said to recognize no higher authority than his own, while he presided over an "exceeding great and glorious" court that was regarded by some European visitors as "the most magnificent among all the Black Nations of Asia."

This explains the deep "prejudice" encountered by the French among Siamese royal officials just before Chaumont's arrival in 1685, when equally biased agents of the \textit{Compagnie des Indes Orientales} had tried "tactfully to convince them that a distinction in terms [between Louis XIV, whom the Siamese regarded as inferior, and Phra Narai] could not be affected only in accordance with their wishes." As a result of much heated discussion, however, these mandarins had been persuaded finally "that both Kings would be accorded equal status," though it is clear from their rumblings against the distinctions subsequently paid to Chaumont that they remained unconvinced of the Sun King's equality. Consequently, for France's Southeast Asian diplomacy to succeed in 1686 it was absolutely essential that Louis appear before the Siamese ambassadors as an oriental despot, the equivalent of Phra Narai in every respect, and not as that of a European sovereign mobbed by unruly crowds of courtiers, which had left such a bad impression with the first two mandarins in 1684.
With everything now in readiness for the audience, very early on the morning of Sunday, 1 September, the sieur de Bonneuil (Introducteur des ambassadeurs) and the maréchal-duc de la Feuillade (colonel of the Gardes Françaises) arrived at the lodgings of the Asian envoys to escort them and their suite to Versailles, just as two oyas had conducted Chaumont to his reception at Ayudhya the year before. Travelling in another elaborate procession of gilt carriages, mounted trumpeters, royal guards and écuyers du roi, the mandarins reached the palace at 10:00 A.M. after a journey lasting about six hours. Waiting on parade in the great forecourt of the chateau, with flags flying and drums beating, were five ranks of the blue-clad Gardes Suisses arranged opposite an equal number of the elite Gardes Suisse dressed in new red uniforms—a fortuitous coincidence that must have recalled vividly the color worn by Phra Narai’s household troops, especially the Braços Pintados. Alighting in the Royal Courtyard, the mandarins entered the Salle de Descente or des Ambassadeurs between double files of the Gardes de la prévôté de l’Hôtel, where they were to await the hour of their audience. Meantime, they performed their ritual ablutions “according to custom” and put on their ceremonial conical hats that were decorated at the base with flowers made of very fine gold leaf to which several rubies in the form of seeds were attached; these flowers were so delicate that the least movement made their petals quiver.

Once word was received that the king was ready to mount his throne in the great Hall of Mirrors, the envoys were escorted in state across the courtyard into the vestibule of the Ambassadors’ Staircase. Six Swiss guardsmen carried on their shoulders the ornate mordocpratinan (a pyramid-shaped, gilt wooden structure like a portable chirole, on which the royal letter had been placed), flanked by four Siamese mandarins holding ceremonial suppathon. In front marched the drummers and trumpeters of the Chambre du Roi, while walking behind were the three envoys, their French escorts and the remaining members of the Siamese legation. Inside the vestibule, Kosa Pàn transferred Phra Narai’s letter to a golden saucer carried by the third envoy, before climbing the Ambassadors’ Staircase to the sound of trumpet fanfares and drums “in order to imitate the custom of the king of Siam, who never descends into the audience chamber except with such music.” At the threshold of the state rooms known collectively as the Grand Appartement, the ambassadors were received by the maréchal-duc de Luxembourg (commander of the Maison du Roi) and thirty officers in full-dress uniform, who led them in procession to the Hall of Mirrors.

In preparation for the audience, at one end of the gallery near the apartments of the Dauphine where the Queen’s bedroom is today, a platform six to nine feet high had been constructed on which was placed a silver throne. The dais itself was covered over with a rich Persian carpet, embroidered with flowers of gold and silver thread to duplicate the floral décor of Phra Narai’s audience hall. On each of the steps leading up to the throne stood great torchères, or candelabra, nine feet tall and cast also of silver, to imitate the lofty umbrellas used in Siam as symbols of state. On either side of the platform’s base were large silver urns and tables that served to cordon off a separate area where the eight mandarins of the Siamese retinue were to kneel during the audience. A spacious semi-circle similarly had been traced on the floor in front of the dais for the three ambassadors to salute the king à la mode de Siam, without being encumbered by the expected throng of spectators, later estimated by Donneau de Vizé at 1,500 persons.

Sitting on his silver throne, Louis XIV seemed to tower above his court in near-Asian splendor. In fact, he was dressed in a suit of clothes made expressly for the ceremony from cloth of gold, set with “prodigiously large diamonds,” in obvious imitation of the gem-studded robes worn in 1685 by the king of Siam. In one respect, however, the French monarch had made a significant departure from the protocol of his Asian counterpart. Unlike Phra Narai who always appeared alone at his elevated throne window, clustered around Louis were the male members of the royal family who were in direct line of succession to the monarchy—including the four-year-old duc de Bourgogne—as if sitting with their patriarch for a group portrait. It was, in short, the collective present and future of the French Crown. Yet, also forming part of this group were the duc de Maine and the comte de Toulouse, the king’s two natural sons by his former mistress Madame de Montespan, who just recently had been legitimized by royal decree “to secure [their] state,” sniped the contemptuous duc de Saint-Simon.

How the Siamese envoys regarded this unexpected alteration in otherwise familiar ceremonial is unknown, but the message was not lost on Louis’s court where this kind of symbolism was understood fully. The Sun King consciously had done was to raise to the same level as himself the Bourbon princes—including the two royal bastards, whom many courtiers still despised despite their new legal status—by imitating the unparalleled position of Asian despotism. The goals of his Southeast Asian policy aside, part of his intention clearly was to emphasize and enhance in a visible way the broad social distinction that already divided royal blood, however diluted, from that of all other Frenchman, noble or common. At the same time it was a theatrical display of royal preeminence, of unrestricted sovereignty, that subtly, though nonetheless powerfully reinforced Louis’s absolutist claims to sole authority in his realm in a manner that far surpassed contemporary European ideals.

On entering the great gallery, the lesser members of the Siamese cortège immediately performed the krip in profound respect for the French monarch, who sat enthroned at the far end. In acknowledgment, he granted them another extraordinary honour strictly prohibited in Siam but usurped by Chau­mont, declaring that they “had come too far not to be permitted to look upon him.” Kosa Pàn and his two colleagues performed the wai, meantime, a gesture they repeated at intervals as they approached Louis’s throne. At the foot of the royal dais, the ambassadors prostrated themselves in their turn, rendering the king a form of homage “that extended almost to adora­tion ...” In response, Louis stood, removed his hat and
saluted his Asian guests with a polite bow before sitting down
again, just as Phra Narai had acknowledged Chaumont’s bows
with courteous nods of his own. Kosa Pán then began his formal
address in Siamese, with his hands carefully clasped before his
face in respect for the king, whom he reverenced periodically.
Each time, Louis responded by doffing his hat.

Once his speech was concluded and the abbé de Lionne had
given a French translation, the moment had arrived for the
presentation of the royal letter, the centerpiece of the audience
according to Asian protocol. Taking Phra Narai’s missive from
the third envoy, Kosa Pán mounted part way up the dais and,
with his head lowered, presented it to Louis XIV. Significantly,
not only did the French monarch stand and remove his hat to
receive it. He advanced two or three paces and, with a slight
bow, took up the royal letter which he handed presently to
Colbert de Croissy, his minister of foreign affairs. With that
simple, yet meaningful gesture, he graciously atoned for the
impudent manner and unbending stiffness of the chevalier de
Chaumont, who had behaved so arrogantly at his audience with
the Siamese monarch the year before. Notes a modern historian,
"a sense of honour, even a spirit of chivalry pervaded all
[Louis’s] negotiations;" after all, "since it formed the base of [his]
reputation abroad." 209 The French king and his Asian guests
then exchanged civilities a short while longer until, the reception
ending, the three envoys and their suite withdrew down the
Hall of Mirrors, performing the wai as they went. Not once,
noted observers, did they turn their back upon Louis, who
remained seated on his throne until they had left the gallery.
After a sumptuous lunch in the Salle du Conseil and one or two
private audiences with other members of the royal family, the
Siamese embassy was returned to Paris with the same pomp
and in the same order as it had arrived at Versailles. 210

Exactly six months later, on 1 March, the three mandarins
and their suite sailed back to Siam, taking with them Louis XIV’s
second French embassy to Phra Narai, headed this time by
Simon de La Loubère and Claude Céberet de Boulay. 211 Osten-
sibly, its mission was to strengthen the diplomatic and commer-
cial ties already established between the two kingdoms by
concluding a firm alliance. But the real goal probably was to
establish a protectorate over Siam, using the 636 soldiers sent
out with the new envoys as an initial holding force—hardly
the small bodyguard requested originally by the Asian monarch.
212 But this embassy, too, failed to achieve its objectives. A fresh
trade treaty was negotiated, to be sure, though under very
trying conditions; meanwhile, the steady growth of strong
xenophobic sentiment at the Siamese court over the foreign
military occupation of Bangkok and the port of Mergui on the
Bay of Bengal did not bode well for the future. In fact, just six
months after the ambassadors had left for France in January
1688, Siam exploded in a bloody revolution that toppled Phra
Narai’s dynasty from the throne, overthrew the French garrison
and closed the kingdom to Europeans except for a single Dutch
trading post.213 By the time news of the disaster had reached
Europe, Louis XIV was engaged heavily in a new war with his
continental enemies and was in no position to respond. French
contact with Siam thus ended abruptly for the next 150 years.

Nevertheless, the image so carefully contrived in 1686 of the
Sun King as an absolute ruler of the Asian type lingered far into
the next century. For some, such as Father Joachim Bouvet, S.J.,
who sailed with the new French embassy to Siam before joining
the Jesuit mission in China, this authoritative image seemed
more benevolent than that of the actual absolute monarchies of
the Far East, whose grandeur long had been envied by European
observers. In a relation of the Ch’ing emperor published in
1699 and dedicated to Louis XIV, Bouvet boasted with more
than usual hyperbole that:

The Jesuits … were not a little surprised to meet at the
utmost corner of the Earth with what they had never
seen before but in France, that is to say; a Prince, who,
like Yourself, has improved his sublime Genius by the
Greatness of Soul, which alone renders him worthy of
the greatest Empire of the Universe; who has the same
uncontrouled Power over his Passions, as over his Sub-
jects, equally adored by his People and Esteemed by his
Neighbours; … In short, a Prince … who would without
question be accounted the most Glorious Monarch upon
Earth, if his Reign had not been coincident with that of
Your Majesty. 214

Others, however, attacked the "oriental despotism" of Louis
XIV and its implicit claims to absolutism. After his death, for
instance, the marquis d’Argenson criticized the excess and
extravagance of the late king’s court in general, as an example of
unsustainable “Asiatic luxury.” More aggressive still was the
marquis de La Fare, who maligned his late sovereign in particular
as an imitator of the kings of Asia, whom slavery alone pleased;
his minister no longer thought of telling the truth, but only to flatter and please him …” 215 Later in the
eighteenth century, such authors as the baron de Montesquieu
in Les Lettres Persanes (1721) and the comte de Mirabeau in his
Essai sur le despotisme (1775) criticized the Bourbon monarchy
both directly and indirectly by comparing it to the autocracies
of the Far East, for which they drew in part upon lingering
memories of the reception at Versailles of Phra Narai’s envoys.
Clearly, the elaborate masquerade that was meant to awe
the Siamese ambassadors in 1686 also had impressed contem-
porary and near-contemporary Frenchmen far more profoundly
than perhaps even the Sun King or his advisors had anticipated.

In his book Pepper, Guns & Parleys, John E. Wills, Jr. com-
ments that to understand the developing relations between
Europe and Asia in the seventeenth century, one must not focus
exclusively on values and institutions directly tied to foreign
affairs. Other factors, such as “bureaucratic routinism, internal
patterns of communication and styles of personal interaction,”
exercised a powerful influence on diplomacy, as well. For
precisely this reason, "close case studies of negotiation and
interaction" are essential in order to appreciate the complexities
involved in the meeting of two very different diplomatic tradi-
tions, their subsequent adjustments to novel circumstances and
"the multifarious difficulties of foreign relations across [wide]
cultural barriers.” 216 These studies become more vital still when
set against the background of the contemporary European intellectual revolution—identified by Paul Hazard in his book, *The European Mind*—that was sparked to a large degree by Westerners looking eastward and discovering there "a vast agglomeration of non-Christian values, [and] a huge block of humanity which had constructed its moral system, its concept of truth, on lines peculiarly its own." As a result, articulate Europeans were forced to recognize that they no longer could

It is within this broader historical and cultural context that Louis XIV's reception of the Siamese embassy to France in 1686, and indeed the whole issue of the relations that developed between the two kingdoms during the period, must be seen. For these diplomatic connections raised new questions of transcultural contact that no European sovereign had had to consider in detail before. With time and repeated experience, however, both Louis and his advisers, on the one hand, and Phra Narai and his officials, on the other, learned to handle the situation through adjustments to diplomatic forms, and thus found their way to an understanding of each other. What is particularly striking about the events at Versailles, however, is that despite the ingrained ethnocentrism of seventeenth-century Europeans generally and Frenchmen specifically, as well as their tendency to deprecate foreign and especially non-western practices, a real effort was made to understand Siamese customs that went beyond simple political showmanship or the Bourbon Crown's need to manipulate them successfully to achieve French ambitions in the Far East by making Louis XIV into an oriental despot.

NOTES


7. Choisy, 5.

8. The three primary accounts were those written by Chaumont himself, by his coadjutor the abbé de Choisy and by the Jesuit Father Guy Tachard. The chevalier de Forbin's account was not published until many years later, as he had remained in Siam after Chaumont's return to France, until 1687.

9. In creating bishoprics for the vicars Apostolic of the *Missions Étrangères* in Asia, the pope borrowed the names of former sees from Roman antiquity that long before had fallen into Moslem hands. Thus, François Pallu (1626–1684), one of the founders of the *Missions Étrangères*, was named bishop of Héliopolis and granted jurisdiction over Tonkinchina. His colleague, Pierre Lambert de La Motte, was created bishop of Bérythe and given jurisdiction over Cochinchina, while another colleague, Louis Laneau, was made bishop of Mételopolis with jurisdiction over Nankin.

11. Ibid., 43–45.


14. Pierre Lambert de la Motte (1624–1679), vicar apostolique of Cochinchina, originally followed a career in law before taking holy orders in 1655. Together with Pallu, he founded the Missions Étrangères in 1657 and left Paris in 1660 for the Far East. He arrived in Siam two years later. He made two brief visits to Cochinchina, in 1669–73 and 1676 respectively, returning to Siam each time. It was there that he died in 1679.

15. Jeremy Kemp, Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century (Bangkok: 1969) 10. This was called variously the act of sombaye, zombaye and choa by contemporary Europeans (see La Loubère, 57–8; Gervaise, 223–24; Tachard, 155, 273; Schouten and Caron, 126–27), all of whom noted that so long as they were in the king’s presence, mandarins, ambassadors and petitioners alike had to remain prostrate.

16. The wai is not just a greeting; it is an act of respect made by bowing the head to meet the thumbs of both hands, palms pressed together and fingers held upward. Originally, the position of the wai showed that one’s hands were empty of weapons; so in this respect it shares a common history with the western handshake, which was initially the clasping of sword hands. The wai is far more meaningful, however, because where the handshake is performed between equals, the wai is an expression of inequality. In essence, the social inferior—who always initiates the act—places himself at the mercy of his superior, while his lowered eyes and head further reduce his ability to defend himself.

17. Adrien Launay, Documents, II, 257. In addition to their exception from performing the kráp, the bishops were permitted to remain seated on a Persian carpet throughout the interview, to wear their stockings instead of appearing barefoot (though they had to remove their shoes) and to perform their civilities to the king “à la mode de l’Europe.” See also E. W. Hutchinson, Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century (London: 1940) 50.

18. Pallu had tried to sail for France in 1674, but his vessel was captured by the Spaniards, who shipped the bishop across the Pacific to New Spain instead, and thence to Madrid. Thus, it took him about three years from the time of his departure from Siam to reach France.

19. Another source for Siamese protocol, though not as complete as Pallu’s, was a brief report written in 1680 by André Deslandes–Bourreau, in which he described the reception Phra Narai gave to the agents of the Compagnie des Indes Orientales who had come to ask permission to establish a trading factory there. See Launay, Documents, I, 104–08.


21. BN. FF. 5623, fol. 36vo. According to most contemporary sources, Phra Narai was attracted to a French alliance in particular because of the reports he had heard of Louis XIV’s power and military success over the Dutch, whose Asian empire also threatened Siam, in the European war between 1672 and 1679. (See, for example, Bèze, Revolution in Siam, 34; Sainctot, “Arrivée de trois Mandarins de Siam en 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fol. 127.) This was later confirmed by the two Siamese envoys sent to France in 1684 (see Sainctot, “Arrivée de trois Mandarins de Siam en 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fols. 129vo–130), as well as by Kosa Pan, chief of the Siamese embassy of 1686, who wrote to the marquis de Seignelay in September of that year that the news of Louis XIV’s victories in Europe had engendered in Phra Narai “an extreme desire” to “make an alliance of perpetual friendship with the French nation…” (BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 195).

22. According to Gayme, Louis was to defray all of the ambassadors’ expenses while in France, just as Phra Narai did for foreign envoys in Siam; the king was to provide transportation for them gratis to Versailles, as well as lodgings along the way; and the route taken by the ambassadors should pass through the finest towns of France “to satisfy their curiosity.” “In short,” noted the French priest, “the king here expects all manner of generosity from His Majesty” toward the three envoys and their suite. (See Père Gayme to the directors of the seminary of the Missions Étrangères in Paris, 18 November 1680 and 18 January 1681, Launay, Documents, I, 109, 112.)

23. For Deslandes–Bourreau’s trade mission to Siam, see BN. FF. nouvelles acquisitions 9380, fol. 84; Martin, II, 709–10. As a result of Siamese unfamiliarity with European protocol and French ignorance of local conditions, this mission too had met with some misunderstandings, especially with regard to French hostility toward the Dutch flag, which the Siamese had flown to honour their new guests because they had no national colors of their own. It was resolved finally that so long as the Siamese hoisted a standard totally unfamiliar to the French, the latter would condescend to acknowledge it. The ceremonial followed at Deslandes–Bourreau’s subsequent audience with Phra Narai also was a matter of contention, as the French envoy—like Pallu before him—had refused to prostrate himself before the Asian monarch.

24. This second royal letter was dated 10 January 1681, a transcription and translation of
which was published by E. W. Hutchinson in, "Four French State Manuscripts relating to Embassies between France and Siam in the XVIIth century," *Journal of the Siam Society*, 27, no. 2 (1934): 196–98. It was presented by Pallu at the Siamese court in 1682 in an audience celebrated with the same pomp and ceremony that the first two missives of 1673 had received. See the "Ordres du roi de Siam pour MM. Vachet et Pascot pour les envoyés," 14 January 1684, Launay, *Documents*, I, 128; Pallecoix, II, 167.

25. See the report of Deslandes–Bourreau, 1680, and Pallu’s letter to Jean–Baptiste Colbert of 15 November 1682, in Launay, *Documents*, I, 105, 116. In fact, the gifts Pallu took with him to Siam in 1682—amongst them, several paintings of religious themes, including the three large gilt mirrors, some fine brocades, two valuable carpets and a watch ornately decorated with enamel—were considered by some Siamese officials to be so disproportionate in value to the grandeur of Louis XIV, that to present them in the king’s name, they warned, would create a bad effect. The bishop was advised, therefore, to present them on his own behalf as tokens of thanks for Phra Narai’s good treatment of the French missionaries in Siam. (See Mgr. Pallu to Jean–Baptiste Colbert, 15 November 1682, Launay, *Documents*, I, 116; Pallu, II, 307–08.) Subsequently, Pallu wrote to M. Fermanel in December 1682 to advise him of the kind of gifts to be sent in future. (Pallu, I, 370.)


27. The *Soleil d’Orient* was the flagship of the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*’s merchant fleet. Apparently, however, it was in such bad condition that it was forced to stop at the Cape of Good Hope in January 1680 on its outward voyage to India, not just to take on fresh provisions but to repair its badly leaking hull. Yet, this seems to have been done incompetently, no doubt contributing to the ship’s loss on the return voyage in autumn 1681 with all aboard, including the Siamese ambassadors and Father Gayme. (See Martin, II, 678–79, 960.) Not until July 1682, when Mgr. Pallu finally reached France, did the French court learn of the disaster.

28. The court also had access to Claude de l’Isle’s book, newly revised and published, in which he gave a few general comments on Siamese protocol taken from his various sources. See pp. 127–28.

29. Their names were Khun P’chai Valit and Khun P’chit Matrii respectively. (Bèze, *Revolution in Siam*, 35.) The term “mandarin”—which was Chinese in origin—was applied to Siamese nobles by the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to visit the Asian kingdom. It was adopted subsequently by the Dutch, French and English, who arrived in later years. (See La Loubère, 80; l’Isle, 145.) "Mandarin," as the Chinese term implies, did not denote great individuals in the European sense of nobility, but rather great servants or titled officers of the Siamese Crown. (Kemp, 47–8.)


31. According to Father Bénigne Vachet, Seignelay had been appointed expressly to deal with the Siamese legation by Louis XIV, even though this matter properly lay within the sphere of his uncle, Colbert de Croissy, the minister for foreign affairs. (Vachet, 139.)

32. Apparently, Claude de l’Isle was entrusted with this duty. (See ibid., 136.) It also seems that he served as their courier throughout their stay in France. (See the report of the Siamese envoy’s expenses, dated January 1685, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179vo.)

33. Seignelay to M. de Barillon, 14 and 30 September 1684, Arch. Mar. B2 51, fols. 403, 418; Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fols. 128–128vo; BN. FF. n.a. 9376, fol. 110vo; Vachet, 138. The envoys were lodged at the *hôtel* de Taranne in the faubourg St. Germain, where they were entertained sumptuously.

34. Sainctot, "Arrivée de trois mandarins ... 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fols. 129vo–130vo; Vachet, 141–42. It was reported later that the same protocol was observed at the envoys’ final audiences with Seignelay and Colbert de Croissy in January 1685. (See BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 179–179vo.)

35. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, Vachet went to Versailles for a private interview with Seignelay, during which he told the marquis the purpose of the new Siamese legation. (Vachet, 138.)


37. Because the two envoys were not officially ambassadors, they were not entitled to a formal audience with Louis XIV. This "accidental" meeting was arranged in its place, to present the mandarins to the king while he was on his way to mass.

38. Vachet, 142. See also BN. FF. n.a. 9376, fol. 10vo.

39. Mgr. Lambert de La Motte, bishop of Bérythe, to the directors of the *Séminaire des Missions–Étrangères* in Paris, 3 December 1673, Launay, *Documents*, I, 31; Ger­vaise, 215, 223; Chaumont, *Relation of the late Embassy ..., 27; Tachard, 273; La Loubère, 30. According to Lambert, this aloofness arose from the belief that the kings of Siam would lose something of their majesty if they showed themselves
too often to their people. Hence, only on special occasions, such as the day appointed for the river races—one of the largest and most splendid of Siamese festivals—and the royal elephant hunts, were the Siamese permitted to look upon Phra Narai, who participated in these events. Otherwise, petitioners, royal officials and even the great mandarins had to keep their face turned to the floor in the king’s presence, while the common people were required to shutter their houses and lie prostrate indoors whenever the king travelled by river on his bateau.

40. Gervaise, 183.

41. Vachet, 143.


43. Vachet, 144.

44. Kemp, 10. This was especially important for the Siamese monarch, who was seated always on an elevated throne or at a high window, overlooking those to whom he gave audience, while these people—by means of the krip—were reduced to the lowest possible level.

45. Ibid.; La Loubère, 55. See also Kemp, 10. The khaan may be defined as “one’s vital spirit which gives strength and health to the individual owner” (quoted in Kemp, 49). Hence, observed La Loubère in 1693: “As the most eminent place is always amongst them the most honourable, the head, as the highest part of the body, is also the most respected. To touch any person on the head or the hair, or to stroke ones hand over the head, is to offer him the greatest of all affronts ... (p. 57).”

46. BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179. The two envoys could not escape so easily, however. When they returned to Versailles on 16 January 1685 to take their leave of Louis XIV, they found themselves trapped into sitting through a second performance of Roland that the king had arranged expressly for that purpose. On that occasion, they were seated in a balcony, but were made so uncomfortable by the curiosity of the audience and by having to sit above the royal head, that “they neither cast their eyes on the King nor on the actors, keeping them lowered, except to glance from time to time to the exit door.” (See Vachet, 147–48; BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179.)

47. Vachet, 144–45.

48. Ibid., 147. The same thing happened when the two envoys attended another mass, celebrated by the archbishop of Paris.

49. This was the designation given the two mandarins by Claude de l’Ise in the introduction of his book on Siam. One of the most interesting aspects of Franco-Siamese diplomacy at this date was the effort to find French equivalents for the ranks of the various Siamese envoys dispatched to Versailles, to fit them within the hierarchy of European society so as to accord them the appropriate honours. Father Gayme, for example, had suggested that the chief ambassador sent with the first ill-fated Siamese embassy in 1680 be treated with the respect due to a marquis in France. (See Father Gayme to the directors of the Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères in Paris, 18 January 1681, Launay, Documents, I, 112.)

50. Mgr. Laneau to the directors of the Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères in Paris, January 1684, Launay, Documents, I, 126; L’Ise, n.p. (introduction). See also Sainctot, “Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fol. 130; BN. FF. n.a. 9376, fol. 110vo.; Mgr. Laneau to the directors of the Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères, January 1684, Launay, Documents, I, 125; Hutchinson, Adventurers, 100; Pallegoix, II, 169; Cédes, “Documents,” 9. The only letters brought by the two envoys to France were addressed to Jean-Baptiste Colbert and Colbert de Croissy from the Phra’klang of Siam, not from the king.

51. The envoys spoke only Thai; however, their official addresses were translated into Portuguese—the lingua franca of coastal Asia—by a member of their entourage. This translation was then rendered into French by Fathers Vachet and Pascot. Otherwise, Vachet spoke directly to the mandarins, being fluent in their tongue. (See Sainctot, “Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fol. 130–130vo.)

52. Cédes, “Documents,” 9; see also Hutchinson, Adventurers, 100.

53. Sainctot, “Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fol. 127–127vo.; Vachet, 135. According to Father Tachard, Phra Narai had heard of the alleged ill-behavior of his two mandarins at the French court, and at their return to Siam he examined their conduct. Only the cheva­lier de Chaumont’s intercession on their behalf, claimed the Jesuit, saved their lives. They were punished instead with imprison­ment. (Tachard, 178.)

54. From all reports, the two mandarins believed that they were being used by Father Vachet for his own ends. (See, for example, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179.) But according to Sainctot, the French priest denied having such authority over the Siamese envoys, complaining in his turn that they were stubborn and difficult to deal with. (Sainctot, “Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fol. 129.)

55. Turpin, II, 79. This was confirmed uncon­sciously by Vachet himself, when he re­called that “the French were as curious of [the envoys] as they were courteous” to them. (Mémoires, 140–41.)

56. See Vachet, 140–43. Curiously, every mod­ern account of the second Siamese lega­tion repeats Vachet’s criticisms without ever attempting to understand the prob­lem from the envoys’ point of view.

57. Given his position at court, Sainctot was well placed to comment on and describe the treatment of the Siamese envoys in 1684 and later in 1686.

58. Forbin, 469.

59. Ibid., fol. 134; Father Bénigne Vachet, “Mémoire pour être présenté à MM. les ministres d’État de France, sur toutes les choses qui regardent les envoyés du Roi de Siam, 1685,” Launay, Documents, I, 154–54; BN. FF. 5623, fol. 37. See also André Deslandes-Bourreau, Histoire de M. Constance, Premier Ministre du Roi de Siam (Amsterdam: 1756) 18–19; Forbin, 469; Bouvet, 7; Martin, II, 992–93.

60. Father Bénigne Vachet, “Mémoire pour être présenté ...,” Launay, Documents, I, 155. See also Deslandes-Bourreau, 18–19; Forbin, 469; Launay, Mission de Siam, I, 59; Prince Chula Chakrabongse, Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand (London: 1960) 61–2.

61. Father Bénigne Vachet, “Mémoire pour être présenté ...,” Launay, Documents, I,
62. Father Bénigne Vachet, "Mémoire pour être présenté ..." Launay, Documents, I, 155. This was the primary motive attributed to Louis by most contemporary observers, such as Deslandes-Bourreau (p. 19) and Forbin (p. 469). According to Claude de l’Isle, the king also announced about this time that his principal purpose in chartering the Compagnie des Indes Orientales was to spread Christianity in Asia, along with his reputation (introduction, n.p.). For the 1680s represented a period in Louis XIV’s life and reign when he began wrestling with his own religiosity, while moving rapidly against the Huguenots and other religious dissidents in his realm. His interest in converting Phra Narai to Catholicism at the same time as he was contemplating the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was not simply coincidental, therefore.

63. Victor-L. Tapie argues that Louis XIV saw himself as the protector of Catholicism at home and abroad in the 1680s precisely because of this political reason, and not because of any real “spiritual and religious sentiment.” (Victor-L. Tapie, ‘Louis XIV’s Methods in Foreign Policy,’ in Ragnhild Hatton, ed., Louis XIV and Europe (London: 1976) 8-9.)

64. BN. FF. 20979, fol. 7. Chaumont would have some competition here: an embassy from Shah Sulaiman the Safavid (1666-94) of Persia arrived in Siam at the same time as the chevalier, with the object of converting Phra Narai to Islam! For a contemporary Persian account of this embassy, see: John O’Kane, trans., The Ship of Sulaiman (London: 1972).

65. Quoted, Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 132vo. This was said by Colbert de Croissy to the two envoys during their meeting with the minister on 27 October. Chaumont was described to Vachet as "a man of rare piety and great humility ..." (Mémoires, 151).

66. It is clear from his orders that Chaumont was to be obeyed "in all things" by the members of his entourage and the captains of the ships that took him to Siam. These vessels were the frigates Oiseau of forty-five guns (Captain de Vaudecrocourt) and the smaller La Maligine of 24 guns (Captain de Joyeux). See: "Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ambassadeur près du Roi de Siam, 21 janvier 1685," Archives Nationales B2 52, fol. 46; "Ordre du Roi pourtant que le Chevalier de Chaumont commande le sieur de Vaudricourt dans la route de Siam, et part tout ailleurs, 21 janvier 1585," Arch. Nat. B2 52, fol. 50vo.; Dangeau, I, 69; Forbin, 469; Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134.

67. "Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ... janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B2 52, fols. 49vo–50; "Lettre de créance au Roy de Siam pour le sieur abbé de Choisy, 21 janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B2 52, fols. 52–52vo.; Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins ... 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134; Choisy, Mémoires, 143; Dangeau, I, 86; Forbin, 469; Martin, II, 995. In fact, Chaumont was under strict orders not to reveal to Choisy his obligation to remain in Siam unless Phra Narai converted.

68. Choisy, 47. The abbé made little progress in the language, however, and confessed that he was able only "to jabber" in it despite his efforts to learn.

69. Forbin, 469. All of these young men were active naval officers and veterans of the Dutch war. (‘Instruction pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ... janvier 1685,’ Arch. Nat. B 52, fol. 46.)

70. The Jesuits were to stay only briefly in Siam before sailing to join the mission in China. Meanwhile, they were required to reveal to Choisy his obligation to remain in Siam unless Phra Narai converted.

72. These gifts included: two large silver mirrors, two silver candelabra of twelve branches each, two large crystal chandeliers weighing 138 lbs. apiece, a telescope, two sedan chairs, twelve finely crafted fusils, eight pairs of pistols, twelve pieces of rich brocade of gold and silver cloth, 100 ells of cloth of various colors (especially scarlet and blue), two clocks showing the phases of the moon, three pendulum clocks marked with the hours in Siamese characters, three bureaux and three tables decorated with rich marquetry, six small round tables, two large Savonnerie carpets (made to order for Phra Narai’s audience halls, according to specifications provided by Vachet), a large basin carved from a single piece of rock crystal and garnished with gold, two suits of Europe clothing in fine brocade, several pairs of silk stockings, various multicolored ribbons, several beaver hats, a variety of cravats and embroidered handkerchiefs, a finely crafted sword with a rich belt and gold buckles, a large equestrian portrait of Louis plus two miniatures painted on enamel and garnished with diamonds, and a box full of medallions and French gold currency. These gifts were sent in addition to the curiosities already purchased by the two mandarins for Phra Narai, who wanted mirrors especially in order to emulate the Great Gallery at Versailles in his summer palace at Lopburi. (See the ‘Passeport pour les présens que le Roy envoye au Roi de Siam, 23 janvier 1685,’ Arch. Nat. B 52, fols. 53–53vo.; Dangeau, I, 115–16; Vachet, 149–50) According to Gervaise, the total cost of all these items was more than 300,000 écus (p. 147).


74. Forbin, 474.

75. Tachard, 139. See also Choisy, 135, 144.

76. According to Father Tachard, one of these mandarins was the Siamese captain of the royal guard and the other was a personal attendant of Phra Narai, the Asian equivalent of the French first gentleman of the bed chamber. (Tachard, 139–40. See also Choisy, 133.)

77. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 20; Choisy, 133; Bouvet, 94; Tachard, 138–40, 141; Forbin, 474–75.

78. Tachard, 142. See also Bouvet, 94–5; Choisy, 133. Simon de La Loubère later criticized those Europeans who sneered at Siamese beliefs in astrology and other superstitions about such beliefs as lucky and unlucky days, writing that the latter ‘Folly [also] ... is perhaps too much tolerated
amongst Christians; witness the Almanac of Milan, to which so many persons do now give such blind belief." (The Kingdom of Siam, 66.)

79. "Menam" (pronounced may-'nahm) is the Thai word for river, literally "mother of waters." "Chao Phraya" (pronounced chow py'-ah) is an exalted title, meaning prince or supreme commander. Hence, the name of this major river of Thailand might be translated most accurately as "Soeverein among waters.

80. La Loubère, 6. According to Gervaise, it "might even be claimed that [Ayudhya's] position was finer than that of Venice, even though the buildings are less magnificent, for the canals which are formed by branches of the [Chao Phraya] river are very long, very straight and deep enough to carry the largest vessels (p. 38)." The Dutch traveller Christopher Fryke dissented, however, preferring to compare Ayudhya (pronounced Aye-oo'-tay-ah) to the port of Rotterdam! (C. Ernest Fayle, ed., Voyages to the East Indies: Christopher Fryke and Christopher Schweitzer (London: 1929) 138.)

81. Choisy, 142-43. The abbé noted that seven of these houses were constructed in all.

82. Tachard, 140; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ... 24; Choisy, 135; marquis de Souches, Mémoires, comte de Cosncac and Arthur Bertrand, eds., vols. I and II (Paris: 1882) I, 404. Like other Siamese dwellings, these houses were built on pilings and constructed entirely of plaited bamboo. Each contained three or four apartments "very sumptuously furnished" and "hung with fine painted linen," with connecting galleries. (Tachard, 140, 152; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 24; Choisy, 139.) "All the Furniture ... was new," noted Chaumont, adding that "the Floor of my room was covered with Tapistry [from Persia], the Chairs were curiously wrought and gilt, as also the Tables to speak nothing of the neatness of the [Chinese] Bed..." (p. 24). "It is necessary to note," confirmed the abbé de Choisy, "that everything prepared for the Ambassador's service was brand new, the tapistries, beds, carpets, sheets, balons, etc." (Choisy, 140; see also Tachard, 152.) According to the chevalier de Forbin, these buildings were moveable; as soon as Chau­mont left one, it was taken apart, shifted up river, and then reconstructed to receive the French embassy. (Forbin, 475.)

83. Tachard, 153; Choisy, 139.

84. Choisy, 139. Tachard put the number of place-settings at sixty for each meal. (Tachard, 152.)

85. Choisy, 140; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 27.

86. Tachard, 140; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 26; Choisy, 135, 136, 143; Sourches, I, 405. This probably was the house mentioned by the abbé de Lioine in a letter dated 2 October 1682 (BN. FF. 5623, fols. 36v-37) and in the "Ordres du Roi de Siam pour M. M. Vachet et Pascot pour les envoyés" (14 January 1684), which Phra Narai had commanded to be build according to Mgr. Palu's specifications in order to receive the envoys of Louis XIV. (Launay, Documents, I, 128.) The marquis de Dangeau also reported that the Asian monarch was building a magnificent palace near the capital for Chaumont's use (I, 69). A similar residence was prepared for the French embassy at Phra Narai's summer capital of Lopburi (or Louvo), north of Ayudhya, where the king planned to remove following his formal reception of Chaumont.

87. According to Tachard, this residence belonged to "a great Mandarin, a Persian by Nation." Not only had it been splendidly furnished, but extra rooms had been added purposely for the accommodation of the French embassy. (Tachard, 140, 148.) It had two reception halls hung with fine painted cloth and furnished with chairs upholstered variously in blue and red velvet, fringed with gold. In Chaumont's private chamber was a costly Japanese screen "of singular beauty." There also was a room set aside with a small fountain in the center, where one could take fresh air in the hottest weather. Yet another chamber contained a chair set beneath a great canopy of state for Chaumont's use at official receptions. Throughout the building, fine porcelains of all sizes and shapes had been placed in niches in the walls. "In a word, everything looked cool and pleasant.

88. Tachard described these balons as Siamese boats "of extraordinary shape," some being as long as 100 or 120 feet, but only six feet wide at their widest point. Their crews consisted of 100, 120 and even 130 oarsmen. (Tachard, 150.) Chaumont wrote, however, that the balons accompanying him were smaller craft of fifty to eighty feet in length, "having oars from twenty to an hundred." The Siamese rowers sat two to a bench, facing the direction in which the vessel travelled rather than the stern as in European fashion. The oar, or scull, was only four feet long. (Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 28.) Choisy noted how the oarsmen rowed in perfect cadence, the sunlight glinting off the oars—"which created a very beautiful effect..."—singing in unison and in the same tone as their comite, whose sole responsibility was to lead them in song. Admired the abbé, "we heard in the same instant 100 voices accord themselves perfectly with 100 ears." (Choisy, 142, 150.) Otherwise, each balon carried as passenger a single mandarin, dressed in ceremonial garb, who carried with him all of his weapons "and even [his] Forks." (Chaumont, 29.) Finally, noted La Loubère, these barges were ranked according to their ceremonial role, the most exalted being the "balon of the King of Siam's body," reserved for his use or for transporting royal letters. (La Loubère, 41.)

89. Tachard, 149; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 23; Choisy, 138. See also Bouvet, 116.

90. After their arrival in Siam in 1512, the Portuguese soon established a permanent settlement at Ayudhya for the purposes of trade and the spread of Christianity. As elsewhere in their Asian empire, inter­marriage was encouraged with the native population to produce a hybrid population that was able to withstand tropical diseases, while remaining politically loyal to the Portuguese Crown.

91. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 28. See also Choisy, 140; Sourches, I, 405.


93. Ibid., 135; Tachard, 149; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 23; Forbin, 475. Choisy recorded that there were thirty balons waiting at the mouth of the river (p. 138). The flotilla also included six large barques, or miroux, to carry the embassy's baggage.

94. Choisy, 139; Tachard, 153; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 24; Sourches, I, 405.

95. Father Bouvet, S.J., for example, was delighted with the fireflies that danced over the river at night, describing the sight in lyrical terms as if "the sky had fallen to the earth." He also wrote that the reflection of these insects in the water was like that of a crystal chandelier "charged with an in­finite number of lights..." (p. 97.)

96. Tachard, 154. Tachard noted further that "His Majesty had already said publicly,
that he would not have the ancient Ceremonies observed as to Chaumont, which were used at the Reception of the Ambassadors of the Mogul, Persia, and China ... (p. 158)"

97. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 27. See also Sourches, I, 405. Other Siamese concealed themselves behind plaited bamboo walls covered with greenery, which had been constructed specifically for the purpose. (Choisy, 140.) According to Siamese custom, whenever the king traveled on the river, his subjects were required to leave their houses and prostrate themselves along the banks or in concealment to ensure that the top of the monarch's head was higher than their own.

98. Choisy, 142. Louis Laneau (1637–1696) was among the first to join the Missions Étrangères founded by Lambert de La Motte and Pallu, whom he followed to Siam in 1662, arriving in 1664. Learning the Thai language quickly, he wrote a number of religious texts for the Siamese king, while serving also as chief medical man for the French missionaries. In 1679 he was created bishop of Métillopolis, and in 1685 and 1687 he played a key role in the two French embassies sent to Phra Narai. Imprisoned by the Siamese during the revolution of 1688, he was released two years later and remained in the kingdom until his death in 1696.

99. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 34. At Bangkok, where the French embassy spent the night of 9–10 October, Chaumont was paid another singular honour: "The streets through which he passed were perfumed with Aquila [probably sandal–or sappanwood] which is a very precious wood, and of a rare scent." (Tachard, 153.)

100. Choisy, 143. Gervaise wrote of such flotillas that "one can best give an idea of its splendour by comparing it to the beautiful ceremonies performed by the doge of Venice when he goes out to marry the sea." (p. 213)

101. The royal astrologers at length had assured the king that this was the ideal day and, noted Choisy, "we were told they are almost never wrong." (Choisy, 147.)

102. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 29. See also Choisy, 144–45; Tachard, 158. In fact, Chaumont had been ordered by Louis XIV explicitly to contact the French missionaries upon arrival in Siam to learn how he would be received by the Siamese.

("Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ... janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B2 52, fol. 47vo.)

103. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy, 29.

104. Choisy, 144.

105. André Deslandes–Bourreau was impressed in 1680, for example, to discover how knowledgeable Phra Narai was of world geography, having had several European books translated for his personal reference, and how informed he was already of French politics and culture. (See the report of André Deslandes–Bourreau to his superiors, 1680, Launay, Documents, I, 106.)

106. Choisy, 143.

107. Quoted by Gervaise, 229.

108. Forbin, 476. This occurred at the very beginning of Chaumont's first audience with Phra Narai on 18 October.

109. It was arranged further that the bishop of Mételropolis and the abbé de Choisy would sit cross-legged on a carpet on either side of Chaumont, while the gentlemen of his retinue—who were allowed to witness the event contrary to Siamese custom—would sit in a similar posture in two or three ranks behind his chair.


111. Forbin, 475. To be fair, however, Chaumont was not entirely in the wrong here. As La Loubère later pointed out, Phra Narai had sent word to the envoy that if any of the court protocol did not suit him, the king would change it (p. 58).

112. The Siamese "understood not Ambassadors, nor ordinary Envoys, nor residents; because they send no person to reside at a foreign Court, but there to dispatch a business, and return." (La Loubère, 108.)

113. Hence, noted La Loubère: "All Oriental Princes do esteem it a great Honour to receive Embassies, and to send the fewest they can ..." (ibid., 110)

114. Ibid. La Loubère observed further that: "Everyone ... who is the carrier of a Letter from the King, is reputed an Ambassador throughout the East."

115. Gervaise, 228.

116. Tachard, 164.

117. La Loubère, 70.

118. The sieur de Saintcot left a description of these elaborate casings. The letter sent by Phra Narai to Louis XIV with his embassy of 1686 was written, as usual, on a sheet of thinly beaten gold, "the kings of Siam never writing otherwise." The missive was then encased in an ornate gold casket, which was placed inside a second one of silver, which was placed in turn in a wooden box of rich Japanese lacquer work. In addition, each casing was wrapped in cloth of gold brocade and closed with the chief ambassador's seal of white wax. (See the sieur de Saintcot, "Reception faite aux ambassadeurs de Siam in 1686," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134.)

119. Choisy, 149. To break the deadlock, the abbé finally convinced Chaumont that they "must accommodate themselves to the customs of the Orient in matters that were far from dishonourable," adding that "one could not render too great respect to the king's letter ... (p. 147)."

120. According to La Loubère, "'Tis with the same Cup, that the Officers of this Prince deliver him every thing that he receives from their hands (p. 99)." The Persian envoy visiting Siam at the same time as Chaumont also noted the use of this saucer, described as a jewel studded paidan with a long gold handle designed to reach the throne window, or "pulpit," at which Narai sat. (The Ship of Sulaiman, 63–4.)

121. Forbin, 475; Choisy, 147; Tachard, 159–60. See also La Loubère, 57, 58, 99.

122. Tachard identified these noblemen as Oya Prassadet, the chief protector of all talapoins (i.e., Buddhist monks) in Siam and thus one of the most important state officers, and Oya Peya Teph de Cha, a first cousin to the king of Cambodia, who was a tributary of Phra Narai (p. 161).

123. Tachard described this as "a kind of little Dome, placed in the middle of the balon ... covered with Scarlet, and lined with Chinese Cloth of Gold, having Curtains of the same Stuff. The Balisters [around it] were of Ivory, the Cushions of Velvet, and a Persian carpet was spread underfoot (p. 149)."

124. For descriptions of the embarkation, see: Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 31–4; Choisy, 149–51; Tachard, 160–63; Bouvet, 116–17; Forbin, 475–76; Sourches, I, 406–07.

125. According to Tachard, a mandarin—thinking he did right—removed the royal letter from its chinoit on the barge before Chaumont could take it. But in doing so, the Siamese "committed a great fault" for which he was punished "on the Spot" by having "his Head pricked, as an Earnest of severer Chastisement" to follow (pp. 163–64).

126. Choisy, 151; Forbin, 476.

127. For descriptions of the procession, see: Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 34; Choisy, 151; Tachard, 163–65; Bouvet, 117–18; Forbin, 476; Sourches, I, 407–08.

128. This entry is described in: Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 34–5; Choisy, 151–52; Tachard, 165–66; Bouvet, 117–18; Forbin, 476; Sourches, I, 408.

129. Siamese troops were well disciplined, and as a simple tabouret or stool, square in shape and without a back, covered with a small carpet (p. 119).

130. Choisy, 151. The abbé also was unimpressed by Phra Narai's guard of Mughal cavalry, noting that their horses "were handsome enough, but badly harnessed." By contrast, Father Bouvet thought the Siamese troops were well disciplined, and that they exhibited the same mien and pride of European soldiers (p. 118).

131. These men also rowed the royal baiyon. (Tachard, 166.) Forbin thought the arms of these troops looked more blue than red (p. 476).

132. Father Bouvet described Chaumont's seat as a simple tabouret or stool, square in shape and without a back, covered with a small carpet (p. 119).

133. The French had been warned expressly—thinking he did right—to remove the royal letter from its chinoit on the barge before Chaumont could take it. But in doing so, the Siamese "committed a great fault" for which he was punished "on the Spot" by having "his Head pricked, as an Earnest of severer Chastisement" to follow (pp. 163–64).

134. According to Quaritch Wales, the suppathon is mentioned in the Pauranic literature of India as one of the essential symbols of kingship, while elsewhere in Southeast Asia it is regarded as part of the regalia of Buddha in the Tusaite Heaven. The suppathon thus is one of the pre-eminent trappings of authority. (Siamese State Ceremonies, 93–4.)

135. Artus de Lione (1655–1713), son of the late Hugues de Lione, marquis de Berny (c. 1671), Louis XIV's former minister for foreign affairs. Artus had joined the Misseions Etrangères after ordination as a priest and was sent to Siam in 1681. In 1686 he returned to France with Phra Narai's third embassy as interpreter, and while there he was named bishop of Rosalie. He returned to Asia the following year, remaining until his return to Europe in 1702, where he died eleven years later.

136. See Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 35–6; 43; Tachard, 167; Forbin, 476; Choisy, 152; Bouvet, 118–19; Sourches, I, 408, 412.

137. Tachard, 168; Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 41–2; Forbin, 476; Sourches, I, 411. See also Claude de l'Isle (p. 128) and Nicolas Gervaise (p. 215) for similar descriptions.

138. Chaumont, 168. See Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 42, for comparison.

139. Choisy was honored to carry Louis XIV's letter, but that honour cost him dearly. Although "the Siamese regarded me with respect," he wrote, "I carried [the letter] more than three hundred feet in a gold vase [from the palace gates to the audience hall] that weighed a hundred pounds, and I was worn out by it." (p. 157) Louis's letter to Phra Narai, dated 21 January 1685, is reprinted in Launay, Documents, I, 159–60.

140. Tachard, 168. See also Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 36; Choisy, 153; Bouvet, 119; Forbin, 476; Sourches, I, 409.

141. For the text of Chaumont's speech, see Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 39–40; Choisy, 153–54. As instructed, the ambassador assured Phra Narai of Louis XIV's friendship, but urged the Siamese to embrace Christianity as the most secure foundation for good relations between the two kingdoms. (See also the "Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ... janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B2 52, fol. 48.)

142. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 36; Choisy, 159; Tachard, 168.

143. In fact, the bishop of Méthopolis translated Chaumont's address into Portuguese, and this in turn was translated into Thai by another court official. According to Siamese custom, ambassadors, petitioners, etc., were never permitted to address the monarch directly; they could speak to him only through an intermediary, a high-ranking mandarin whose position was sufficiently exalted that he could address the king personally.

144. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 56; Choisy, 154; Tachard, 171; Sourches, I, 411. In fact, after the audience Chaumont complained about this breach of promise. But when told that the mandarins despised ever displeasing their monarch, the ambassador retorted coolly: "And I was even more embarrassed: you have only one King to please, and I have two!" (Quoted in Choisy, 157.)

145. Tachard, 171.

146. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 56; Choisy, 154.

147. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 40; Choisy, 155; Tachard, 171; Bouvet, 119; Forbin, 476; Sourches, I, 411.

148. Quaritch Wales, Siamese State Ceremonies, 184.

149. Choisy, 155; Tachard, 171.

150. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 36, 40.

151. Hutchinson, Adventurers in Siam, 104.

152. Choisy, 155.

153. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 43–4; Choisy, 156; Tachard, 173; Bouvet, 119–20; Forbin, 476–77; Sourches, I, 411.

154. Choisy, Mémoires, 149; Martin, II, 993.

155. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 38–9.

156. The three ambassadors were: P'ya Wisut Sunt'on (known commonly as Kosa P'an), brother of the late Phra'klang of Siam, who himself would serve in that capacity during next two reigns; Ok Luang Kalayan Ruchai Maitri, an elderly man and former ambassador to China; and Ok Khan Si Wisan Wacha, a young man whose father just recently had been sent as ambassador to Portugal. The three envoys were accompanied by a suite of eight other mandarins, twelve Siamese youths who were to be educated in the language and crafts of France, twenty servants and, as usual in Siamese diplomacy, a rich load of presents for Louis XIV and his family (see note 166 below).

157. For modern, though largely descriptive, narratives of the Siamese embassy to France of 1686, see: Launay, I, 59–63; Pallecoix, II, 90–1; Hutchinson, Adventurers, 115–22; Syamananda, 79–80; Wood, 206; H. Belevitch–Stankevitch, Le gout chinois en France au temps de Louis XIV (Geneva:
158. Louis XIV to the sieur de Brancas, French ambassador to Spain, 20 November 1714, quoted in Tapie, "Louis XIV's Methods in Foreign Policy," 3-4. Added Louis, "After careful deliberation [of the available information] I give my view, which I am ready to support with strong arguments since I know that it is the best course to follow."

159. Choisy, Mémoires, 150; Sourches, 1, 401. See also Deslandes, 23.

160. "Mémoire de M. de Chaumont de ce qu’il faut faire pour rendre les mêmes honneurs aux ambassadeurs de Siam, que le roy de Siam en l’a fait à son regard," 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 197–197vo. Chaumont recommended that the new ambassadors be met at Brest by royal officials; that they be paid the same honours during their journey to Paris that he had received in Siam; that they be greeted by local and provincial dignitaries along their route; that they be lodged everywhere in the best houses possible; and finally that they be saluted with artillery at every town through which they passed. Chaumont’s recommendations corresponded almost exactly to those forwarded to Versailles by the late Father Gayme in 1680 (see note 22 above).


162. On their first night ashore, for example, the three envoys were hosted by the intendant Desclouzeaux and his wife at a banquet held "in a superb chamber," at which the principal table was set for twenty–four persons. Six other tables seated eight more persons each. "During the whole meal," wrote Vachet, "there was a symphony, and from time to time several delicious voices sang." (Vachet, 181.)

163. Sainctot, 134vo.–135; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 198; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam 1686," BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459; Dangeau, I, 354; Smithies, 19. According to Donneau de Vizé (pp. 9–10), M. Storr (or variously, Storl, Torf, Storst, Cort and Tornt Botentorh) had been selected because of his skill at handling similar missions in the past, such as the Muscovite embassy of June 1685. (See also Dangeau, I, 152.) Furthermore, noted Vachet (p. 183), he "never left the side" of the three envoys during their stay in France.

164. Originally, Louis had planned to convey the envoys by boat up the Seine River to the French capital, perhaps in accordance with Siamese practice. But he suddenly changed his mind, sending them overland instead. (Louis XIV to the sieur de Vaudricourt, 25 June 1686, and to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, Arch. Nat. B2 56, fols. 119–119vo.; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Montmart, 25 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 198–198vo.)


166. These gifts included: two ceremonial canons, cast at Siam, that were both six feet long, inlaid with silver and mounted on carriages also garnished with silver; a variety of caskets, ornate boxes and coffres of precious metals and scented and lacquered woods; porcelain; silk fabrics; jewelry and so on. Many of these items came originally from Japan and China, not just Siam. There were gifts as well for the Dauphin and his wife, the ducs of Bourgogne and d’Anjou, and the marquis of Seignelay. ("Mémoire des présents que le Roi de Siam a fait au Roy et de ceux de M. Constance et de la princesse tant à Mme. la Dauphine qu’a MMggrs. les dues de Bourgogne et d’Anjou et à MMs. de Seignelay et de Croissys," BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 146–149vo.; Michael Smithies, trans., The Discourses at Versailles of the First Siamesse Ambassadors to France 1686–7, Together with the List of Their Presents to the Court (Bangkok: 1986) 70–96.) The value of these gifts in France was estimated at over 50,000écus. (Deslandes, 23.)

167. The embassy’s baggage was exempted from the various customs tolls along the river, for which special passports were issued, but to prevent tampering, the rates were also specially sealed until their arrival at Paris. Moreover, every precaution was made to prevent damage to the goods. (See Sainctot, fol. 140; M. de Montmart to the marquis de Seignelay, 1 July 1686, Arch. Nat. B3 51, fol. 150vo.; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Montmart, 2 July 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 198–198vo., 199–199vo.; marquis de Seignelay to M. de Frémont, 25 July 1686, Arch. Nat. B2 57, fols. 489–489vo.; Donneau de Vizé, 13.)

168. Marquis de Seignelay to M. Lelison and to M. du Metz, 29 July 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 200; Dangeau, I, 364; Vachet, 182; Sainctot, fols. 137–38. Originally, it was planned to house the Siamese legation at Vincennes, but because the maison du Roy was under repair and the medieval keep was inappropriate to house them, Berry was selected instead.


170. Vachet, 182; Donneau de Vizé, 10.


172. Lecocq, 11.

173. Breteuil, 238. See also Sainctot, fol. 140vo.; Donneau de Vizé, 49; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs ... 1686," BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459; Choisy, Mémoires, 152; Vachet, 182; Dangeau, I, 364. Doubtless this new principle was a direct result of French
interest in Siam; it also was a very expensive policy. The total costs of the Siamese embassy from 9 July to 1 September—including transportation, food, rents, lodging charges and so on—was 29,036 francs, not counting cash reimbursements amounting to 7,500 francs paid to Chaumont, Vaudricourt and Joyeuse for expenses incurred on the homeward voyage. The costs of the Siamese embassy for the month of September amounted to 18,310 francs. (BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 200vo-201; Dangeau, I, 387.)

174. For the same reason, none of the envoys was placed in the room immediately above that containing the royal letter. (Sainctot, fol. 134.) This explains, in part, why Vincennes was unsuitable for their residence prior to entering Paris. To accommodate them properly in the medieval keep, seeing that the maison du roy was under repair, would have required one of the envoys to occupy the chamber above the royal chamber that would have been reserved for the chief ambassador, thus placing him higher than the royal letter. This was forbidden by Siamese custom.

175. Ibid., fols. 134-134vo.; Smithies, 20.


177. Vachet, 182; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459. See also the contemporary account of the journey attributed to Kosa Pán, the chief ambassador, in Smithies, 19–25. Only at Orléans, Fontainebleau and Vincennes. To give an idea of the entertainments the envoys received along the way, shortly after their arrival at Berny a masked ball was held. All the guests attended in costumes supposedly representing the national dress of Siam, China, Japan and Cochinchina. Among their number was the marquis de Seignelay, who had come incognito with members of his family and other high-ranking court nobles. To avoid any missteps, however, Vachet warned Kosa Pán of the marquis’ identity and then relied on his discretion to act appropriately, “being convinced that he had sufficient presence of mind to handle it.” (Vachet, 182.)


181. Kosa Pán to the marquis de Seignelay, September 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 195vo.

182. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 135–36.

183. Abbé de Lione to Father Vachet, 19 August 1686, Laneau, I, 185.

184. Their route had taken them through Rennes, Nantes, Angers, Blois, Chambord, Orléans, Fontainebleau and Vincennes. To give an idea of the entertainments the envoys received along the way, shortly after their arrival at Berny a masked ball was held. All the guests attended in costumes supposedly representing the national dress of Siam, China, Japan and Cochinchina. Among their number was the marquis de Seignelay, who had come incognito with members of his family and other high-ranking court nobles. To avoid any missteps, however, Vachet warned Kosa Pán of the marquis’ identity and then relied on his discretion to act appropriately, “being convinced that he had sufficient presence of mind to handle it.” (Vachet, 182.)

185. Gazette de Paris, 3 and 12 August 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 200vo.; Donneau de Vizé, 45–50; Sainctot, fol. 138–140vo.; Vachet, 183. A company of the Cent Suisses and another of the Garde du corps du Roy formed part of the procession, as well as eight mounted trumpeters of the chambre du roy—an extraordinary honour paid to Phra Narai’s letter, seeing that fanfares never were sounded at the entry of ambassadors into Paris. The guards initially had joined the envoys at Vincennes and Berny “to protect the gates from the tremendous crowd of people who came to see” them. These units were to remain with the Siameselegation for the duration of its stay in France. (Sainctot, fols. 137–vo.)

186. Donneau de Vizé, 48–9. Their route took them along the rues de St. Antoine, de la Verrerie, de la Ferronerie, de St.—Honore and de l’Arbre—se, thence across the Seine River by the Pont Neuf to the rue Dauphine and finally into the rue de Tournon. Apparently, the sheer size of the procession caused severe traffic jams along the way, despite the presence of the soldiers to keep order.

187. Originally, the ambassadors were to have been received at court on 14 August, two days after their entry into Paris. But because of a brief illness of the king, the audience was postponed until September.

188. Chaumont, Relation of the Late Embassy ..., 77. See also Bourges, 160.

189. Gervaise, 67.

190. Tachard, 273; l’Isle, 128; Caron, 128; Bourges, 160. According to Prince D’Hani-Nivat, however, Siamese monarchy in the seventeenth century never was considered intrinsically divine. Rather, it was paternal in nature, the king acting as father to his people, as well as lawgiver, military leader and ruler. Not only was he rewarded for his responsibilities with deep popular respect, he also was held accountable for national and even natural calamities, such as crop failures. The ideal Siamese monarch was thus the "King of Righteousness," based on the Thammawat tradition of Buddhism, and "Protector of the Faith." (“The Old Siamese Concept of the Monarchy,” Journal of the Siam Society, 36, no. 2 (1947): 91–106.)

191. Bourges, 160; Tavannes, II, 290–92; Gervaise, 221. Of Siamese ceremonial generally, wrote Gervaise, "There never has been any court anywhere in the world more ritualistic than the court of the king of Siam."


194. Caron, 97; Kaempfer, 30.


196. These were issued and first worn by the Gardes Suisses on 22 March 1685. The officers, however, wore blue. See Dangeau, I, 139.

197. Sainctot, fols. 141vo–143; Breteuil, 238–39; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fols. 459vo–459vo.; Sourches, I, 436; Donneau de Vizé, 59–63; Smithies, 43–4. Apparently, this room was not near the Ambassadors’ Staircase, regrettably destroyed in 1752 by Louis V’s renovations, but on the opposite side of the courtyard near where the Queen’s Staircase is today.

198. Sainctot, fol. 143. See also Breteuil, 239; Donneau de Vizé, 63.

199. This “machine” had been damaged slightly on the voyage to France. Thus pleading that it would be impracticable to take it overland to Paris from Brest with the envoys, the French authorities sent it with the rest of the embassy’s baggage up the Seine River. It was repaired quickly at the French capital and then transferred to Berny in time for the mandarins’ arrival. Thereafter, it remained with the Siameselegation, being kept usually in the chief ambassador’s bed chamber.

201. Sainctot, fols. 144-145vo.; Breteuil, 239-40; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 460vo.; Sources, I, 43637; Donneau de Vizé, 64-46; Smithies, 44-5.

202. Sainctot, fols. 143vo.-44; Breteuil, 234; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459vo.; Sources, I, 436; Choisy, Mémoires, 152; Donneau de Vizé, 65-7; Smithies, 45.

203. Sources, I, 436-37; “Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam,” 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459vo.; Sources, I, 436; Choisy, Mémoires, 152; Donneau de Vizé, 67-8; Smithies, 45. At the time, it was estimated that Louis’s attire cost two million livres!

204. This group also included the Dauphin, Louis’s son and heir; the duc d’Orléans, his brother; and the duc de Chartres, his nephew. They, too, were dressed in garments studded with diamonds, rubies or emeralds, depending upon the base color of their surcoats.


206. Sainctot, fol. 146vo.; Breteuil, 240; Sources, I, 437; Donneau de Vizé, 68; Smithies, 45.

207. Choisy, Mémoires, 152.

208. For this address, see the Harangues Faites à Sa Majesté, et aux Princes et Princesses de la Maison Royale, par les Ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam, à leur première audience, et à leur audience du congé (Paris: 1687). A modern English translation of these speeches, with a facsimile of the original published French versions, can be found in Michael Smithies, trans., The Discourses at Versailles of the First Siamese Ambassadors to France..., 24-48.


210. For the details of the audience itself, see: Sainctot, fols. 146-150vo.; Breteuil, 240; Sources, I, 437–38; Dangeau, I, 378; Choisy, Mémoires, 152; Deslandes, 23; “Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam,” 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fols. 460vo.-462; Donneau de Vizé, 67-71; Smithies, 45-6.


212. But as Tapié notes, military force was regarded at Versailles as an essential instrument of foreign policy, in order to defend what already was possessed and to acquire more. (Tapié, "Louis XIV’s Methods in Foreign Policy," 5)

213. For the revolution in, and repulse of, the French from Siam, see: A Full and True Relation of the Great and Wonderful Revolu-

214. Joachim Bouvet, S.J., The Present Condition of the Muscovite Empire, till the Year 1699 ... with the Life of the Present Emperor of China (London: 1699) n.p. (Introduction). Bouvet also witnessed the revolution of 1688. See the relation of his voyage to Siam.

215. Charles Auguste marquis de La Fare, Mémoires et réflexions du marquis de La Fare, Émile Raunie, ed. (Paris: 1884) 186-87. La Fare’s criticisms were hardly unbiased, however. Like Saint-Simon, he fell into disgrace when he resigned his commission in the royal army at the height of the Dutch war, for which Louis did not forgive him. No doubt this accounts for his ill-will toward the king.
