

SECTION VIII

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
(Continued)



A STORMY RELATIONSHIP: PHAULKON AND FORBIN, 1685–1687

MICHAEL SMITHIES

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER, BUA YAI, THAILAND

The astonishing rise to power in Siam in the 1680s of the Greek, known to history as Constance Phaulkon (originally Constantino Gerakis, frequently spelled Jerakis or Hierakis),¹ of obscure and disputed origins, seems barely credible today, but as Hutchinson (1940) and Collis (1936) have made clear, he lived in an age of opportunistic adventurism, and certainly took advantage of the possibilities for personal advancement which came his way.

The cosmopolitan nature of King Narai's reign (1656–1688) was noted by all foreign visitors. Chaumont, the first French ambassador to Siam in 1685, wrote:

There is no City in the East, where is seen more different Nations, than in the Capital Town of Siam, and where so many different Tongues are spoken. (1687, 106–7)

The country was largely dependent on entrepôt trade for its wealth, and most of the traders were from elsewhere. The Western community, though much smaller than the Asian (which included Tonkinese, Cochinese, Peguans, Japanese, Chinese, Malays and Makassarese), comprised the "factories" of the Dutch, the English, and the French, and independent traders including Danes and Armenians. The Persians were present in considerable numbers and supplied servants to the crown, whom Phaulkon supplanted (Ibrahim 1972). It is not within the scope of this article to detail Phaulkon's background and rise to power, but it should be noted he rewarded two former East India Company merchants, Richard Burnaby and Samuel White, his previous masters, with the governing of the then important province and port of Mergui (Hutchinson 1940, 77).

It should not seem strange then, that King Narai should formally request the continued presence in Siam, after the departure of the Chaumont–Choisy embassy in December 1685, of the Chevalier de Forbin; Phaulkon himself had only entered King Narai's service proper about 1683 (Van der Cruysse 1991, 248; 260–1). Chaumont laconically notes in his published *Relation* for 10 December 1685 that while watching an elephant hunt, the King

prayed me to leave Mr. Forbin, the Lieutenant [sic] of my Ship, with him, which I agreed to, and presented him, and at the same time the King gave him a Semitar whose Handle and Guard was of Gold, and the Sheath studded with the same, with a Justacorp of embroidered Satin with Gold Buttons. (1687, 60–61)

Such a request could not have come out of the blue, and the ground would have to have been prepared by Phaulkon, in his capacity as chief minister and interpreter to the French embassy.

Choisy is rather more forthcoming in his *Journal* (1993). There are fifteen references to Forbin (who like Chaumont he spells Fourbin) between the time the embassy set sail from Brest on 3 March 1685 and the end of November in the same year. Choisy soon appreciated Forbin's qualities. When playing chess with him on 16 March, he noted Forbin was

sharp, has a fiery imagination, a hundred plans, in short is Provençal and forbidding. He will go far ... He is our Lieutenant ... [and] has the keys to the water ... In a word, he is a handsome lad, who does not look as though he will stay a mere lieutenant for long. (1993, 49)

It was Forbin who was selected to go ashore first when the embassy reached Bantem and Batavia to negotiate with the Dutch; it was Forbin who went ahead to Bangkok, with Father Vachet, when the embassy reached the Bar of Siam. He was made adjutant by Chaumont on 13 October, and all gentlemen were instructed to obey the orders he issued on the ambassador's behalf. On 24 and 25 November he was despatched from Lopburi to Ayudhya to deal with a drunken brawl in which the French were involved, and sent the lot back to ship. On 29 November Phaulkon gave presents all round, distinguishing in particular the Chevalier de Forbin and the Chevalier du Fay (a relative of the first ambassador Chaumont). On 3 December, Choisy wrote:

The Chevalier de Forbin will remain here; the King is expected to ask for him at our next audience, and I think

he will make a considerable fortune. He pleases the Minister who sets him to the most important tasks. He might go on to command the fleet of the King of Siam off the coasts of Cambodia. (1993, 210)

Choisy notes for 10 December 1685:

His Majesty showed much confidence in the Ambassador, and presented him with a golden saucer and a covered cup likewise of gold, made in Siam. He then requested that he leave behind the Chevalier de Forbin to be employed in his armies. The ambassador granted his request very readily, called Forbin, and presented him to His Majesty, who promised to take care of him, and immediately gave him a golden sabre and a magnificent jacket. (1993, 215)

Tachard, another witness, notes towards the end of the mission's stay in Lopburi, after a fairly long audience with Ambassador Chaumont, the king

sent for the Chevalier de Forbin, an old Officer, who had gained reputation on many occasions. The Lord Constance had prayed the Ambassador to leave him at Siam with the King his Master. Nay his Majesty himself thought fit to demand him of the Ambassador, and made him a Present of a very lovely Shable [sic], as a Mark that he received him into his Service. He added to the Present besides, a Vest of a flowered Stuff, with Gold Buttons. (1688, 234)

The English translation does not do justice to the facts or to the French edition,² which says of Forbin: "Tout le monde connoît la qualité & le mérite de cet Officier. Il sert depuis longtemps, & il s'est distingué en plusieurs occasions" (p. 242). That he served under the colors a long time did not make him an old officer; he was only twenty-nine at the time.³

Forbin was not the only person from the embassy whose continued presence in Siam followed. On the same occasion, Chaumont offered the king the engineer La Mare (sometimes spelt Lamare or Lamarre), whose job would be to improve the condition of the forts in the country and protect them from attack. Choisy notes "His Majesty thanked him heartily and accepted his offer" (1993, 215). La Mare was to do sterling work, and produced plans for the improvement of the forts at Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Phattalung, Songkhla, Inburi, Bangkok, the environs of Ayudhya and the royal palace therein (Jacq-Hergoualc'h 1993).

Who was this Forbin, whom Chaumont, Choisy, Phaulkon, and King Narai all apparently noted as above the ordinary? He was born in 1656, according to his own memoirs (which for reasons which will be explained have to be treated with caution) in Gardanne in Provence, and as indicated above was still relatively young at the time of the embassy. He came from a family established in Marseilles since the fourteenth century, which became rich through maritime trading; a distant cousin

was the powerful Cardinal de Janson (1626–1713) who was to help Forbin on several occasions, as did Louis XIV's influential principal valet de chambre, Bontemps. At the age of twelve Forbin ran away from home to join, as a cadet, a galley commanded by an uncle, and served in several campaigns. In 1675 he took part in the relief of Messina, besieged by the Spanish; the following year he was with the troops, commanded by Louis XIV, in Flanders. In 1677 he entered "sea service," was made an ensign, and, in addition to killing the Chevalier de Gourdon in a duel, served in Brest. In 1680 from Rochefort he joined the fleet commanded by the Count d'Estrées sailing to "the American Islands" (the Antilles), returning the following year. In 1682 and 1683 he was twice off Algiers, taking part in a French bombardment of the city, and then went to Lisbon to accompany the Marquis de Torcy sent to congratulate King Don Pedro on his accession. Forbin was involved in an amorous adventure at the end of that year with a chambermaid he disguised as a cadet and established at Aix, and in 1684 was asked, when in Paris, by the Chevalier de Chaumont to join his embassy to Siam. After consulting his cardinal cousin and Bontemps, he decided to accept. Thus by 1685, although still quite young, Forbin had seventeen years of military service and wide experience of the world.

However, Forbin did not readily assent to staying on in Siam, as his own *Memoirs* make perfectly clear.⁴ Both Chaumont and Choisy give the impression King Narai had only to ask and Forbin jumped at the chance. This was certainly not so. Forbin writes that Phaulkon

gave His Majesty to understand, that besides the services which I was capable of doing him in his dominions, it was convenient that, since he intended to send Ambassadors to France (for they were actually nominated, and everything was ready for their departure), some person of the Ambassador's retinue should stay in the kingdom, in the nature of a hostage, to be answerable for the behaviour of the Court of France to the Ambassadors of Siam.⁵ (1731, I: 101)

When the king's intentions were made known to Chaumont (according to Forbin),

the Ambassador told the Minister that he was not master of my destiny, and that it was none of his business to dispose of any one of the King's officers, especially one of so distinguished a family and rank in the world as the Chevalier de Forbin. (I: 102)

Forbin was not witness to this conversation, which is highly unlikely to have included the last remark. Forbin's ancestry was not that brilliant, and his family was by then impoverished; it may account for his condescending comments about Phaulkon's own origins:

This minister, who was by birth a Greek, and from the son of a vintner, at a little village called Custode⁶ in the

Isle of Cephalonia, was come to be absolute governor of the Kingdom of Siam ... (I: 107)

Chaumont's reply did not put off Phaulkon, who advanced all the arguments he could think of, and finally said "that the King would absolutely detain me in his country as a hostage." Not surprisingly, Chaumont was "astonished," and consulted with Phaulkon and Choisy as to how "to persuade me to acquiesce in his Siamese Majesty's intentions" (I: 102). In passing, one could remark that it showed some naiveté on Chaumont's part if he really thought the wish expressed by the king were indeed his and not Phaulkon's.

Choisy was delegated to broach the matter with Forbin, who told him

that setting aside the dislike I should have to stay behind in a country so remote, and with a people whose manners and customs were so different from those of my native country, I could never think of sacrificing my small beginnings which I had made of a fortune in France, and the hopes of further advancement, to stay in Siam, where the greatest establishments I could expect were not equivalent to the little I had already. (I: 102–3)

Choisy considered Forbin's view "very reasonable" and conveyed it to Phaulkon

who, taking him up very quick, said to him, "Sir, let not the Chevalier de Forbin trouble himself about his fortune, but leave it to me. He does not yet know the country, and the value of it; we'll make him High Admiral, General of the King's Armies, and Governor of Bangkok, where a citadel is going to be built forthwith for the reception of the troops that are to be sent hither by the King of France." (I: 103)

Forbin's memory of events is undoubtedly wrong here (he did not apparently start to write his memoirs until 1710, a quarter of a century later than the period he is describing). Phaulkon's proposal to bring French troops to man the fort in Bangkok had been rejected by Chaumont and Choisy, and it was Tachard who was to push the matter on his return to France in 1686.

Forbin was still not tempted when Choisy brought "these fine promises" because he "perfectly knew the miserable state of this kingdom" and persisted in wishing to return to France. But "M. de Chaumont was so pressed by the King, and much more by his Minister, that he could not deny him what he so earnestly entreated" (I: 103). The French ambassador one day came in person to Forbin, no longer using Choisy as a go-between, and pointed out that he could not refuse the King of Siam's request, advising Forbin to accept it, otherwise he would be forced to stay should King Narai insist.

Still Forbin was unmoved, told the ambassador he argued to no purpose, and he would not stay in Siam unless he was ordered to do so in the name of Louis XIV. "Agreed (said he), I command you then accordingly." Forbin, with "now no other

remedy left," acquiesced, but requested the order in writing, to which the ambassador agreed.

Four days after this I was installed Admiral and General of the King of Siam's armies, and received the sabre and vest, the ensigns of my new dignity, in presence of the ambassador and all his retinue, who came to wish me joy. (I: 104)

So that what appeared, in the accounts of Choisy, Tachard, and even more Chaumont, as a simple matter of a royal request made and granted, was in fact surrounded by much preparation, discussion, and contention.

Phaulkon, a master of guile, had of course other reasons for retaining Forbin than those professed. Forbin writes:

In the various negotiations which I had managed with him, by virtue of my function as major of the embassy, he discovered in me that openness, that character of frankness, which rendered it impossible for me to dissemble, or to call things by their wrong names. Therefore he was apprehensive that as I had no great notion of Siam, or of any commerce that could be settled there, which I had declared very frankly, though I did not, in the least, suspect his design; he apprehended, I say, that when I came to France, I should make the same declaration as I had done at Siam, and that, by divulging my entire opinion of this country, I should, with a word's speaking, dash that project in pieces, on the success of which he founded all his hopes. (I: 113–4)

The project, already alluded to, was to bring French troops to man "the key of the kingdom," Bangkok, who would come to the assistance of Phaulkon when necessary.

Phaulkon was, to look forward somewhat, quite right in his assessment of Forbin. When Forbin eventually found his way back to France in 1688, he met the Secretary of State (later Minister) for the Navy, the Marquis de Seignelay, the King himself, and his powerful Jesuit confessor, Father de La Chaize, and to each he said, according to his own account, exactly what he thought of the prospects of trade, the position of Phaulkon, and the possibility of the conversion of King Narai.⁷ He was, if his account is true, to be proved right by events shortly afterwards, when in November 1689 news of the events in Siam in May 1688 began to filter out of the prisons of Middelburg into which many survivors of the French imbroglio had, by the fortunes of war, been incarcerated.

It is at this juncture that a caveat about excessive reliance on Forbin's own account of events must be raised. His memoirs were not published in French until 1729, and appeared in Amsterdam, not in Paris; they were not therefore subject to royal approval. Louis XIV died in 1715 and Father de La Chaize in 1709. Seignelay died in 1690; as for his successors, the Counts of Pontchartrain, Louis the father (who was promoted to chancellor in 1699) and Jérôme the son, with both of whom Forbin had frequent disagreements, the elder died in 1727 and his son

was in disgrace shortly after Louis XIV's death. Chaumont departed this world in 1710, Tachard in 1712, and Choisy in 1724; Phaulkon was assassinated long before, in 1688. François Martin, the founder of Pondichéry, where Forbin spent much time in 1687, died in 1707, and Céberet, director of the French Indies Company, with whom Forbin travelled back to France in 1688, died in 1702. Virtually no one was alive or in power in 1729 to contradict Forbin's account of events. The close proximity of the death of Pontchartrain the father and the date of publication of Forbin's memoirs makes it appear likely that Forbin waited for his moment to publish, the more so since he "retired" (or more correctly was dismissed) from service in 1710. Even one with as little formal education as Forbin need not have taken nineteen years in retirement to write his memoirs, especially as he apparently had the assistance of a secretary specifically for this purpose.

Forbin's stay in Siam was closely allied to the intrigues of Phaulkon. Hardly had the ambassadors departed (on 22 December 1685) than Forbin left with Phaulkon to Lopburi and was taken into the palace there for the first time. He was astonished to see the courtiers (termed "mandarins" by all Westerners) sitting on osier mats with only one lamp between them, taking if they needed to read or write some tallow out of their pockets and putting it on a piece of wood in lieu of a candlestick. He asked Phaulkon "if all the grandeur of the mandarins consisted in what I then saw?" Phaulkon took him to one side and said (according to Forbin) "Don't be surprised at what you now see. This, in good truth, is a poor kingdom; but, however, your fortune shall not suffer by it: leave that to me" (I: 116). They then had a long conversation in which Phaulkon propounded his political strategies. He realized he was little loved by the Siamese, that with the king's health declining he needed a foreign power in the kingdom to support and protect him. He could expect no support from neighboring rulers who were all untrustworthy; the English, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish saw no hopes of gain in the country (I: 111). This left the French, whose pious monarch could be persuaded that the King of Siam might embrace Christianity. Neither Chaumont nor Choisy thought the French ruler would agree to send troops, engineers and money necessary for manning the fortress of Bangkok, but Tachard, promised a Jesuit college and an observatory at Lopburi, undertook to pursue the matter with Father de La Chaize, the king's confessor.

This conduct of the Minister surprised me altogether as much as the misery of the mandarins. For could it be imagined that one of his refined politics would have so freely opened his breast to a man whom he had so lately hindered from returning to his own country, because he was always afraid to trust to his discretion? (I: 116-7)

For the first two months Forbin went to the palace every day, without seeing the king, but then began to see him with increasing frequency. Narai asked him one day if he was not very glad to stay at his court. "I did not think myself obliged to tell him the truth, but made answer that I esteemed it a very great happiness

to be in His Majesty's service" (I: 117). This was, he admits, a great falsehood, for he was anxious to return to France, the more so on seeing "with what severity the smallest faults were punished." These punishments included slitting the mouths to the ears of those who did not speak enough, sewing up the mouths of those who spoke too much, cutting off a man's legs "for very trivial faults," burning their arms with a red-hot iron, striking them on their heads with a sabre and pulling their teeth out.

A man is condemned, for nothing at all almost, to the bastinado, to carry a cangue, or to be exposed bare-headed to the scorching heat of the sun; and there's scarce a subject living but, at one time or other, has had the points of canes thrust under his nails to the very root, or his feet put in the *cep* or stocks, and other punishments of the like kind. (I: 118)

Phaulkon assured Forbin that foreigners were exempt from such treatments, but Forbin later discovered Phaulkon lied, for he himself had been bastinadoed when his predecessor was in power. The king administered all punishments through the "four hundred executioners with him, for his ordinary guard," and even members of the royal family were not exonerated from punishment (I: 117).

Forbin was provided with "a very little house," thirty-six slaves and two elephants. His housekeeping was cheap, and he ate with Phaulkon. He was supplied with twelve silver plates, two large silver cups, four dozen napkins, and two yellow wax candles every day. He did not enthuse about Siamese food, for when he accompanied the king on his elephant hunts and Phaulkon was obliged to absent himself, he had "much ado to make a meal on what was cooked for the king" (I: 119).

Forbin was also provided with an interpreter, through whom he communicated in conversation with the king.⁸ One day he sought pardon for one of the king's domestics who was about to be chastised for having forgot a handkerchief. King Narai was "downright angry with me," Phaulkon "waxed pale," but Forbin

had the presence of mind to tell the prince that the King of France, my master, when mercy was begged for criminals, was charmed that he had an opportunity of showing his moderation and clemency. (I: 120)

and his subjects therefore were more zealous and caring for him. The mention of Louis XIV and his example was apparently enough to melt the king's heart.

From that day the king took greater pleasure in conversing with Forbin, who told him how things were done in France, and accompanied him on his frequent elephant hunts, which even Forbin had to admit was one of the finest sights in the world.

Forbin discovered another deception of Phaulkon. The roof of a chapel sheltering a colossal statue which Phaulkon had told the ambassadorial party was of solid gold fell in, broke the statue, which was found to be only of "plaster gilt." Forbin teased Phaulkon so much on this account that he "found it made him uneasy" (I: 129).⁹

Forbin was then ordered to go to Bangkok to build a new fort there which was to be occupied by the French soldiers expected to return with the Siamese ambassadors to France. "We there drew the model of a pentagon:" this was most likely done with the aid of the engineer La Mare, also left behind like Forbin. Both Forbin and Phaulkon had to put down an insurrection of eighty half-Portuguese half-Japanese soldiers; "Constance acquitted himself very well upon this occasion" (I: 131), showing much resolution and intrepidity. A council of war despatched the rebels, one being executed, one having his hand cut off, some banished and the rest condemned to the galleys.

Before both returned to Lopburi after settling this matter, a new trouble arose, entirely caused by Phaulkon's cupidity. He wished to buy cheaply some Timorese sandalwood brought to Ayudhya by a French Huguenot trader, the Sieur de Rouan, who refused the price he was offered and was clapped into irons by Phaulkon for doing so. Véret, the French factor, complained to the king that a Frenchman had unjustly been imprisoned. The king ordered his release pending an explanation from Phaulkon on his return from Bangkok. Phaulkon sought Forbin's support in his argument that Rouan, being a Huguenot, was no longer French, but operating with the English, and so was not entitled to French protection. The king in council sent for Forbin and sought his views. Forbin repeated Phaulkon's argument. The king said he agreed with the reasoning; Forbin went to Phaulkon and told him, and was rewarded with embraces and promises "that he would never forget the signal service I had done him" (I:137). Forbin persuaded Phaulkon to release Rouan without condition and restore his cargo of sandalwood, which he agreed to do.

However, Phaulkon noted the favor Forbin enjoyed with the king, and was "naturally jealous and mistrustful." Seeing that one word from Forbin was enough to get him out of a royal scrape, he was persuaded Forbin "might ruin him with as much ease as I had protected him" (I: 138). He therefore determined to ruin Forbin first, at whatever cost.

The king, though, raised Forbin to greater heights, giving him the title "Opra Sac di son Craam" (*Opra Sakdi Songkram*), "which is almost tantamount to that of Marshal of France" (I: 139). At the ceremony granting him the title he was presented with the usual gold betel set and "two pieces of India stuffs with gold flowers, which were large enough to make me two rich suits" (I: 141).

Such signal favor "raised the jealousy of M. Constance to a more violent pitch than ever" (I: 141). He decided to poison Forbin "but I had notice of it from a friend, which determined me to eat by myself" (I: 142). Phaulkon apparently did not take this as a sign Forbin was aware of his intentions, and when the chevalier had a fever one day Phaulkon sent him "some milk curdled, of which he knew I was not a little fond." Forbin, though, knowing Phaulkon's intention, did not touch it, but inadvertently left it "where my slaves could come at it, so that four of them ate it, and died upon the spot" (I: 142). Forbin mentioned this matter to the French Missionary Bishop of Métellopolis, Louis Laneau, who advised him to put his trust in God and be always on his guard.

Phaulkon "being resolved not only to remove me, but to pursue me to destruction," (I: 142) looked around for every

opportunity to be rid of his irritant. A golden opportunity came unexpectedly in the revolt of the Makassars;¹⁰ Forbin was unaware of the situation of the Makassar community in Ayudhya, and of their formidable reputation in combat. He was simply told to depart to Bangkok, where he was governor, to finish the fortifications without delay, and to raise 2,000 Siamese soldiers and drill them. At the same time, without informing Forbin, Phaulkon released the Portuguese who had earlier been condemned to the galleys and ordered them to form companies as before.

To send me hither in this manner, without giving me the least intimation of the favour intended to the Portuguese, was delivering me, as it were, bound hands and feet to my enemies. (I: 145–6)

Forbin overcame this, being on his guard, and managed to win the men over. But worse was to come. A Makassar galley, involved in the conspiracy, decided to slip away when it became obvious that the planned revolt was known about; Phaulkon gave a pass to the captain and his fifty-three men to depart the kingdom in peace. Forbin however was instructed to put up a chain between the two Bangkok forts and stop the departure of the ship. Forbin was in addition to

go aboard her, take an exact inventory of all her cargo, and then make a seizure of the captain and all the crew, and detain them under arrest, till fresh orders. (I: 147)

He was furthermore instructed not to inform anyone of his orders. "Thus did he send me, as it were, to the slaughterhouse" (I: 148).

The details of havoc caused by the Makassarese do not form part of this account. Forbin managed to get the captain and his men off the ship, but they fought like devils with their kris; by the end of the first day alone Forbin lost 356 men and the Makassarese seventeen; many more were to die before all the Makassarese were accounted for. Forbin sent an account of these events to Phaulkon, warning him to be on his guard against the ferocity of this people; by way of reply he was reproached for imprudence. Phaulkon, it must be admitted, had reason to upbraid him for so many lives lost.

For the rest of his time in Bangkok, Forbin saw to the improvement of his fortifications, observed the peccadillos of some missionaries, and the antics of apes, caught crocodiles, and entertained four of the Jesuits, Fathers de Fontenay, Bouvet, Gerbillon, and Visdelou, who had accompanied him on his outward journey to Siam and had obtained a passage to China. He spoke of Phaulkon's treatment of him, and was advised "to return to France with all convenient speed" (I: 183).

Phaulkon had one more trial in store though. Forbin was instructed to board an English ship, which carried forty guns and ninety men, at the bar with no more than two men of his own, and arrest the captain for high treason, on the grounds he had once cheated the King of Siam of merchandise "to a considerable value." Forbin notes:

I could plainly see ... that this commission, which was not much unlike that of the Makassars, was nothing more than a new trap laid for me by the jealousy of M. Constance. However, I resolved to execute his orders literally. (I: 185)

Again, the details of Forbin's stratagems in arresting Captain Lake on board the *Prudent Mary*,¹¹ while interesting in themselves, are not of relevance to the subject of this article. Forbin succeeded, obviously beyond Phaulkon's expectations, and in giving his account by letter remonstrated that his commission was unworthy of an admiral. Again, by way of thanks, he received objections to his rashness and folly, and was ordered not to leave Bangkok beyond two leagues (about ten kilometers).

This decided him, he says, to leave for France as soon as possible. When the four Jesuits reappeared, having been shipwrecked on their way to China, Forbin showed them the letters he had received from Phaulkon, and they,

speaking with more freedom to me than they did the time before ... advised me in plain terms to withdraw from the country as soon as I could.

They gave it as their opinion that the Minister, who had taken umbrage at the favour I was in at Court, who wished for nothing so much as my destruction, would pursue me so often with his malice, and would at last concert his measures so well, that I should not be able to escape him. That since the Lord had preserved me hitherto, I ought not to tempt his providence, but on the contrary to resign, and to withdraw from a country where my life was in continual perils. (I: 198)

Hedid "not think it convenient to go away like a deserter" (I: 199) though, and wrote to Phaulkon asking him to seek the king's agreement to his departure, citing failing health, and offering to present his case at court in person. Phaulkon, who now was convinced of the arrival of French support with the next embassy, was not worried by whatever Forbin might relate in France, and replied "that it not being the King's intention to lay a restraint upon me, I was at my liberty to go where I thought fit" (I: 199). Forbin wrote to "a young mandarin of my acquaintance, whose name was Prepi" (Phra Pi or Mom Pi, Narai's favorite at court, and possibly his chosen successor), whom he had once saved from a royal beating, and informed him of his impending return to France. Phra Pi mentioned this to the king, who "knew not a tittle of what had passed" and asked

his Minister what were the reasons that obliged me to retire, and bade him send for me to Court, that he might enquire himself what grounds I had for my disgust. (I: 200)

Forbin was already on board the *Saint Louis* (Vongsuravatana 1992, 282), a ship of the French Indies Company which was about to sail for Pondichéry, when Phaulkon sent a Portuguese officer to conduct him to Court. The bishop, Véret the French

factor, and a missionary Mr. Manuel, were present when the Portuguese arrived; the bishop took Forbin to one side and advised him to beware: he would be assassinated, and the persons guilty would be hanged at once. Forbin, knowing the king only sent his own guards (the so-called "painted arms") with any of his orders, said to the bearer of Phaulkon's message

That I should pay no manner of regard to the order he came with; that His Majesty having given me leave to withdraw, it was not probable that he had altered his mind so soon, or that he was disposed to detain me any longer in his dominions, after all the solid arguments which I had done myself the honour to set before him; that he might therefore go whenever he pleased, and carry my answer to M. Constance. (I: 201-2)

He admitted that he talked "in such a high strain" because he was about to leave the following day, and he "had nothing more to fear from the malice of the Minister." Forbin declared on his departure that he was mighty glad to be "leaving this cursed country" (I: 202).

Forbin's departure from Siam took place at the beginning of 1687; his ship arrived, via the Straits of Malacca, in Pondichéry in January (Martin 1932, II, 455). He thus left long before the arrival of the second French embassy, led by La Loubère and Céberet, on 6 October 1687, and also before the massacre of the English in Mergui on 25 July 1687. In Pondichéry, like everyone else, he speaks in the highest terms of François Martin, the director of the French "factory."¹² After wandering around the Bay of Bengal his ship put into Mergui, in time to meet on 30 December 1687, a little upstream of Tenasserim, the co-ambassador Céberet returning overland from his mission (Jacq-Hergoualc'h 1992, 149). The two travelled back to Pondichéry, and on 2 February left on the *Oiseau*, the same ship which had taken Forbin to Siam three years earlier, to arrive in Brest on 18 July. Siam and Phaulkon occupied many hours of their conversation.

There remains to consider Forbin's estimation of Phaulkon's character. After all that had passed, one could hardly expect it to be glowing, but, the passage of time helping, and Phaulkon's cruel death, made Forbin's assessment not totally uncharitable. When considering Phaulkon's past, Forbin noted that he was quick to depose the Barkalon, his former employer, from the king's favor.

M. Constance, having thus made his benefactor the first victim which he sacrificed to his ambition, began to render himself odious to the whole kingdom. (I: 108)

Phaulkon, to win over Tachard to his project, dazzled his eyes "with the advantages he thought the [French] King would reap from this alliance" and Forbin notes how Tachard

was deluded in another respect by this crafty minister, this occasional hypocrite, who, pretending a pious zeal as a cloak for all his secret practices, represented how much religion would be advanced as well by the King of

Siam who he made him believe would certainly embrace Christianity ... (I: 112–3)

Forbin was aware how much Phaulkon was disliked by the mandarinates, and how many of them hoped the affair of the Sieur de Rouan would bring about his downfall (in this respect, Forbin did the country a disservice by supporting Phaulkon's arguments before the king). Petracha he knew well, "a man of resolution, esteemed by his countrymen for his courage, and respected for the austerity of his manners" (I: 240). Forbin was shocked when he learnt from the Marquis de Seignelay of the conduct of the French forces in Bangkok, which ignored Phaulkon's letters to come to his assistance in Lopburi in 1688. He says he told the minister that

if I had been then at Bangkok, I would have flown without any scruple to the assistance of M. Constance, whatever reason I had to complain of his ill usage of me in other respects. (I: 241)

He learnt that when Petracha understood how little the French under Desfarges cared about the fate of Phaulkon once he was in the hands of his enemy, he proceeded to put the minister to death. Had Forbin known the details of his agony (for these details, see Van der Cruyssen 1991, 460–3) he would have been still more charitable to his former adversary. He understood (and the records bear him out) that Phaulkon died "with the sentiments of a Christian, and the courage of a hero." Then comes his assessment:

Notwithstanding the many ill turns he did to me, I frankly own that I am inclined to believe [the] report [of those who were in Siam during the revolution]. For M. Constance had a soul that was great, noble, and sublime, and such a superior genius as enabled him to conduct the greatest projects to an issue with a world of prudence and sagacity. Happy Constance! If all these great qualities had not been clouded over by gross defects, especially by a boundless ambition, by insatiable avarice, often even to a degree of sordidness, and by a jealousy which, taking fire on the least occasions, rendered him harsh, cruel, implacable, insincere and capable of the most hateful things in life. (I: 243–4)

Forbin's summary of the whole French adventure (which it is true has the benefit of hindsight) is also pertinent:

That ill-concerted undertaking, which though very expensive, could be of no advantage to the [French] kingdom, and which the Court was merely wheedled into by promises that were specious in appearance, but had no solid foundation. (I: 244)

Forbin, with La Mare, of all the French who came with the first embassy of Chaumont and Choisy and who left accounts of their sojourn, stayed the longest and was certainly closest to the ma-

neurers of Phaulkon. His final judgment, of a brilliant mind which overreached itself in ambition and cupidity, a person capable of bold resolution and courage and also base meanness and blind to his precarious position, is indeed borne out by other accounts.

There is a curious epilogue to Forbin's tale. In 1695, while his ship was cruising in the eastern Mediterranean, he put into the island of Cephalonia.

The country where we were put me in mind of M. Constance: I had for a long time forgot what he made me suffer at Siam, and his misfortunes had so reconciled my friendship to him, for I did not always hate him, that after his death, for which I was truly sorry, I was desirous of nothing so much as to do a pleasure to his family.

I enquired about them, and was told that he had a brother left at the village of Custode. I went in quest of him the very day after we arrived, and after having paid him a compliment, I told him that there were very considerable sums at Paris which M. Constance had sent thither by Father Tachard, when he returned with M. de Chaumont.

I was very well informed of this article: for I had it from M. Constance himself when we were very good friends; which is a plain proof of what I have already advanced elsewhere, that this minister had no other view by settling the French at Bangkok than to obtain the protection of France, to which kingdom he even proposed to retire, if ever the situation of his affairs should oblige him to it.

His brother was persuaded by what I had said to him to go to France. I took him aboard, and paid him all the civilities imaginable. He went to Paris, and retired from thence with very great sums; but, as if it had been destined that I should never meet with anything but ingratitude from that family, he set out for his own country, not only without returning me thanks, but even without doing me the honour of a visit. (I: 324–5)

Forbin was the one person in the whole Franco-Siamese imbroglio to go and visit Cephalonia, and the only person to make contact with Phaulkon's remaining family in Europe. Phaulkon's ungrateful brother presumably obtained the funds deposited from the Jesuits, though Tachard was in Paris in 1695 until March; he left Port-Louis on 27 March on another journey to the Indies (Vongsuravatana 1992, 238). Forbin was again in Cephalonia in 1696, which is when he may have obtained information of the outcome of Phaulkon's brother's visit.

Forbin fitted well into an age of adventurers; the gusto with which he subsequently describes the numerous battles in which he fought, his licensed piracy in the North, White and Mediterranean seas, his escape from prison in England, all point to a rough and tumble life in which the wheel of fortune turned frequently. Phaulkon, though, played for bigger stakes, and his fall was all the greater. Not for him the quiet retreat from the active world at the end of the day to a chateau in the south of France, which was Forbin's more enviable lot.

NOTES

1. Gatty, in her introduction to the narrative of Père Bouvet, noted "Jerakis ou Hiérachy, latinisé en Falcone, Falcon, puis Phaulkon, [fut] souvent appelé M. Constance par les Français" (Bouvet 1963, xxxvii).
2. Amsterdam: P. Mortier, 1688, p. 242.
3. Bouvet, yet another witness to the incident, remarks more succinctly that the king gave "au Chevalier de Fourbin un juste au corps de brocard de France, et un beau sabre pour l'employer à son service" (1963, 150).
4. *Memoirs of the Count de Forbin, Commodore in the Navy of France: and Knight of the Order of St. Lewis ...* 2 vols. London: J. Pemberton, 1731. This is a translation of the French original which appeared in Amsterdam with Girardi in 1729 (extracts of this were reissued as *Le Voyage du comte de Forbin à Siam 1685-88*, Zulmas: Cadeilhan, 1991). Forbin died in 1733.
5. The spelling and punctuation in all the quotations from Forbin have been modernized.
6. Custode is apparently Argostoli (sometimes Argostolion), which was not the capital of the island before 1757; the capital in the Middle Ages and for most of the time under the Venetians (who occupied the island from 1500-1797) was San Giorgio, which was destroyed in an earthquake in 1636. The French edition of the *Memoirs* is even more damning on the subject of Phaulkon's origins, saying he was "fils d'un cabaretier."
7. See Michael Smithies (1994) for Forbin's account of his views to these persons.
8. Forbin does not tell us in what language(s) he communicated with Phaulkon, who spoke Siamese, Malay, Portuguese, English, and Greek. Forbin's education was rudimentary since he ran away from his tutor at the age of twelve, so the two appeared to have no common language. The interpreter provided presumably knew French and Siamese. Choisy (1993, 193) gives precious information regarding the languages he used with Phaulkon; the abbé spoke in Italian, and the minister replied in Portuguese.
9. The statue in question appears to be that described in Choisy (1993, 175-6) found in Wat Phra Sri Samphet, Ayudhya.
10. For details of the revolt of the Makassars, or Bugis, see Wyatt (1984, 114-5).
11. Forbin does not supply the name of the captain or the ship; Hutchinson (1940, 127) gives these details.
12. Martin in his *Mémoires* (1932, II, 482) clearly indicates that Forbin tried to return to Siam by every possible means, and finally had to be ordered not to return on the *Saint Louis*. Forbin makes no mention of this in his own memoirs. He may have wished to continue his private trading; the list of goods declared to the French customs on his return is impressive (1731, I, 221).

REFERENCES

- BOUVET, JOACHIM**
1963 *Voyage de Siam*. ed. J. Gatty. Leiden: Brill.
- CHAUMONT, CHEVALIER DE**
1687 *A Relation of the late embassy ... to the court of the King of Siam*. London: Mortlock.
- CHOISY, ABBÉ DE**
1993 *Journal of a voyage to Siam 1685-1686*. Trans. and intro. by Michael Smithies. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- COLLIS, MAURICE**
1936 *Siamese White*. London: Faber and Faber.
- FORBIN, CLAUDE**
1731 *Memoirs of the Count de Forbin, Commodore in the Navy of France: and Knight of the Order of St. Lewis ...* 2 vols. London: J. Pemberton. (This is a translation of the French original which appeared in Amsterdam with Girardi in 1729.)
- HUTCHINSON, E. W.**
1940 *Adventurers in Siam in the seventeenth century*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- IBRAHIM, IBN MUHAMMAD**
1972 *The ship of Sulaiman* [1686]. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- JACQ-HERGOUALCH, MICHEL**
1992 *Etude historique et critique du JOURNAL DU VOYAGE DE SIAM DE CLAUDE CEBERET envoyé extraordinaire du Roi en 1687 et 1688*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- 1993 *L'Europe et le Siam du XVIIe au XVIIIe siècle: Apports Culturels*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- MARTIN, FRANÇOIS**
1931-34 *Mémoires*. 3 vols. Paris: Société de l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises.
- SMITHIES, MICHAEL**
1994 *Descriptions of old Siam*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- TACHARD, GUY**
1688 *A relation of the voyage to Siam performed by six Jesuits ...* London: A. Churchill. French ed., Amsterdam: P. Mortier.
- VAN DER CRUYSE, DIRK**
1991 *Louis XIV et le Siam*. Paris: Fayard.
- VONGSURAVATANA, RAPHAËL**
1992 *Un jésuite à la Cour de Siam*. Paris: France-Empire.
- WYATT, DAVID K.**
1984 *Thailand: A short history*. London: Yale University Press.