

SIAMESE MANDARINS ON THE GRAND TOUR, 1688–1690

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Abstract

No less than four groups of Siamese ‘mandarins’ (the term given by Westerners to *khunnang*, nobles or court officials) were sent to France by King Narai between 1680 and 1688. Their function, and their fate, were varied. In this article, the first three missions are summarized, and the fourth, to France and Italy, which has been largely overlooked, is described in detail.

The first group of Siamese mandarins to go to the West between 1680 and 1688 comprised the ill-fated embassy led by the aged Ok-ya Phipat Kosa, who had led three embassies to China, supported by Ok-luang Sri Wisan and Ok-khun Nakhon Wichai. It left Siam on 24th December 1680 and was sent to Louis XIV and Pope Innocent XI bearing letters, sumptuous presents and protestations of friendship. The impetus for this came from Louis Laneau, Bishop of Metellopolis, in charge of the French outpost in Siam of the Société des Missions Étrangères, who had developed cordial relations with the Siamese king since his establishment in Ayutthaya in 1664; Laneau supplied one of his Missionaries, Claude Gaymer, as interpreter to the Siamese embassy. As the *Mémoires* of François Martin (1932: II 180, 185), the father-in-law of André Deslandes-Boureau, make clear, this embassy, contrary to established belief, had nothing to do with the trading treaty and good relations established by Deslandes, representing the French East Indies Company, since the despatch of the embassy had been agreed in January 1680 before the arrival of Deslandes in Siam in September. It also had nothing to do with the rise to power of Constantine Phaulkon, who did not effectively become chief minister until 1683.

This embassy left Siam on the *Vautour* on 24th December 1680, spent eight months in Bantam waiting for a ship to go to France, and finally boarded the *Soleil d’Orient*, sent from Surat. The ship called at Mauritius in November

1681 and was never heard of again. There were no survivors from this apparent shipwreck which most likely occurred at the end of 1681.

The second mission to Europe was not an embassy proper, but was sent to ascertain for sure what had happened to the first mission. Louis Laneau broke the unfortunate news of the probable loss to King Narai in September 1683, and the king decided on sending Ok-khun Phichai Walit and Ok-khun Phichit Maitri to France to determine its fate. These two courtiers were considered uncouth and inflexible by their interpreter, the Missionary Bénigne Vachet, initially aided by Antoine Pascot. They left Siam on 25th January 1684 on an English vessel which landed them at Margate from where they went to London. Vachet was presented to Charles II at Windsor by the French Ambassador in London, Paul de Barrillon. The diarist John Evelyn recorded on 26th September 1684 that an embassy from the King of Siam met the King. On the royal yacht, the *Charlotte*, the Siamese envoys left England with their presents and crossed the Channel to Calais. They crossed Picardy and were well-received everywhere en route for Paris. Vachet had a terrible time trying to persuade them to see the sights and listen to operas; they had to be ‘prodded like buffaloes to undertake any civility’ (cited by Cryusse 1991: 267) and undoubtedly suffered cultural shock. They were informally received by Louis XIV (an occasion arranged through the intermediary

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of the former transvestite courtier the Abbé de Choisy) in the newly constructed palace at Versailles on 27th November, and managed to irritate His Majesty by refusing to rise from the floor in his presence. They nevertheless were given a conducted tour of the palace and gardens while the king was at mass, and were thoroughly bored by both. They also visited Saint-Cloud, the residence of Louis XIV's brother, the Palais Royal, Notre Dame, a session of the Parliament presided over by the king, and Chantilly in the snow (Van der Cruysse 1991:278–9).

Their somewhat pointless mission had one very important consequence. Vachet sowed the idea in the ear of Louis XIV's confessor, Fr de La Chaize, and to the king himself, that King Narai might convert to Catholicism if a sufficiently grand embassy were to be sent to him. Probably supported by the pious secret wife of Louis XIV, Mme de Maintenon, the preposterous idea gained the king's favour, and he decided on sending the Chevalier de Chaumont, seconded by the Abbé de Choisy as co-ambassador, on an embassy to Phra Narai. This left Brest on 3rd March 1685, with the two recalcitrant Siamese envoys, Vachet and other Missionaries, and six Jesuits destined to go to China. Once in Siam, one of the Jesuits, Guy Tachard, managed to strike up a close bond with the now powerful Phaulkon, and, abandoning China, returned with the embassy to France with secret instructions from Phaulkon to negotiate the sending of French troops to Siam in return for the handing over of Siamese fortresses. The Secretary of State for the Navy, the Marquis de Seignelay, decided these would be Bangkok and Mergui, to be occupied by force if necessary.

The third Siamese mission to France, the first embassy proper to arrive, was headed by Ok-phra Wisut Sunthorn (Kosa Pan), *rachathut*, with Ok-luang Kanlaya Ratchamaitri as second ambassador or *uppathut*, and Ok-khun Siwasan Wacha as third ambassador, or *trithut*. This left Siam in December 1685 with the returning French embassy, arriving in Brest on 18th June 1686. The embassy was fêted throughout its stay, and was the talk of the town. It travelled by land from Brest to Nantes and up the Loire valley to Orléans, went around the outskirts of Paris waiting for the royal presents to arrive by

boat up the Seine, made a magnificent entry to Paris, was received at Versailles several times, and travelled, at Louis XIV's expense, in the north and in parts of Flanders recently conquered by the king. The details concerning this embassy are comprehensive, the court circular the *Mercure Galant* even publishing a special volume on the doings and sayings of the ambassadors (summarized in Smithies 1989: 59–70). But they were not privy to most of the negotiations going on behind their backs between Tachard, La Chaize and Seignelay, and when the Marquis de Seignelay proposed to them that Bangkok be handed over to the French, Kosa Pan was visibly taken back. They also had to fulfil very extensive shopping lists from Phra Narai, who ordered, inter alia, incredible quantities of mirrors and crystal for the embellishment of his palace in Lopburi, and a great number of hats of different sizes, shapes and materials.

This Siamese embassy returned with what amounted to a French expeditionary force to Siam (there was a total of 1,361 troops, officers, ambassadors, priests etc. on board six ships that left Brest on 1st March 1687), together with a second French mission led by Simon de La Loubère and supported by a director of the French East Indies Company, Claude Céberet. They were not accredited with the title of ambassadors, but were 'envoys extraordinary'; it was hoped in Versailles that such a designation would limit the flow of presents required for full embassies. Tachard, too, returned, with instructions to negotiate with Phaulkon, which rendered the position of La Loubère and Céberet equivocal to say the least. Revelling in his power and abject before Phaulkon, Tachard, who even stooped to carrying Phaulkon's orders to his cook, gave in to every proposal from Phaulkon, who was undoubtedly placed in a difficult position. He had to persuade the king his master to allow the French troops to occupy Bangkok, 'the key of the kingdom', and its chief port on the Bay of Bengal, Mergui. He was not aware, unless Tachard was in a position to inform him, that the French troops had orders to seize these places if they were not handed over voluntarily.

During this French mission, King Narai determined on sending a further mission to France, which would also call on Pope



Father Guy Tachard, S. J.



Ok-muen Phiphit Racha



Ok-khun Wiset Phuban



Ok-khun Chamnan Chaichong

Figure 1

Sketched by Carlo Maratta (1625–1713) in Rome in December 1688/January 1689 (Vatican Library BAV. Vat. Lat. 14166. Reproduced with permission from *Somosorn 25 pee Thai-Vatican*, Bangkok 1994

Innocent XI. The earlier Siamese embassy of 1680 should have gone to Rome with letters and presents, but, as noted, never reached its destination. He decided, probably at Phaulkon's urging, to send Fr Tachard as Siamese envoy, though he was not given the title of either ambassador or envoy extraordinary because of his cloth. To give the mission a Siamese flavour, though, three 'mandarins' were 'selected to accompany the letters of the king' (1689: 301). They were Ok-khun Wiset Phuban, Ok-khun Chamnan Chaichong, and Ok-muen Phiphit Racha, though the records are not clear which of these was the most senior. We know more about Chamnan, who had been selected for an embassy to Portugal, which left for Goa at the end of March 1684, reaching there more than five months later. As the Portuguese fleet had left for Lisbon, the embassy spent nearly eleven months in Goa waiting for a ship to take it to the Portuguese capital. The embassy embarked at Goa on 27th January 1686, but the Portuguese vessel was shipwrecked on 27th April off Cape Agulhas; Chamnan and his surviving companions had to undertake a long and difficult journey overland before reaching the Dutch outpost at the Cape. From there he went to Batavia, spending six months there again waiting for a ship, and returned to Siam in September 1687, without ever having reached his destination (the details of Chamnan's odyssey fill Book VII of Tachard's *Second Voyage*). However, during his travels Chamnan managed to pick up some Portuguese, which Tachard thought an advantage, which was why he was selected to participate in the 1688 mission.

This new mission left Siam on the *Gaillard* on 3rd January 1688 with the returning envoy extraordinary, La Loubère (Céberet had gone overland to Mergui and then separately by ship from Pondichéry). The journey was fraught, as the enmity between La Loubère and Tachard was now open, and Tachard sank into paranoia, even accusing La Loubère of cutting a hole in the partition separating their cabins so that he could read Tachard's documents. Their ship reached Brest on 25th July 1688 and, after sending a flurry of letters in all directions, Tachard went ahead to give his report to the

court at Versailles, leaving his mandarins to their own devices. They re-embarked at Brest, according to Tachard, on

. . . a small frigate belonging to His Majesty, with the presents from the king their master and his minister [Phaulkon] for the king and all the court, and went to Rouen, where they waited for all the bales [of presents] before taking the carriages sent for them from Paris to seek audience with His Majesty. (1689:386)

The Siamese mandarins finally arrived in Paris on 14th September, followed on the 17th by three catechists from Tonkin and five Siamese schoolboys selected by Phra Narai to pursue their studies in the college of Louis-le-Grand.

The king was at Fontainebleau and, after the revelations of Forbin (1997: 164–71), who had also returned from Siam to France in July, concerning the limited value of Siamese trade and the little likelihood of the conversion of King Narai, he was uncertain what steps to take in matters Siamese; he was also undoubtedly made aware of the conflicting accounts presented by the envoys extraordinary La Loubère and Céberet, and the Jesuit Tachard to the Secretary of State for the Navy, the Marquis de Seignelay. He at first arranged an audience in Versailles for 15th December, but then, according to Tachard, on the strength of a letter from the Cardinal d'Estrées in Rome, he changed his mind. A more likely explanation is that the king wished to avoid further Siamese commitments for the present, and decided the Siamese and Tachard should defer their audience for handing over Phra Narai's letter and presents until after seeing the Pope. As Tachard fondly hoped to leave to return to Siam in March 1689 with yet another French expedition, he made all haste to leave for Rome.

Accompanied by his three mandarins and two of their valets, Tachard left Paris on 5th November 1688. Their interpreter, Moriset (sometimes Morisot, and Tachard's erstwhile assistant) went on ahead with two other Siamese valets and the bales of presents. There were also the three Tonkinese catechists who were going to Rome as representatives of the Christians in their country in order to seek the reinstatement of the Jesuits there. Tachard's party went first

to Lyons by stage-coach, and then the whole group went down the Rhône as far as Avignon. There they took litters as far as Cannes, where they arrived on 26th November 1688. The town showed them, and Tachard, ‘honours which I did not expect’ (1689: 387); this was arranged by the Bishop of Grasse, who had charge of the town, and who had undoubtedly been alerted by Tachard of his function as Siamese envoy. However, the weather was too good to waste time going to Grasse to thank the prelate, so the whole party boarded two feluccas which the Marquis de Seignelay had arranged to be waiting for them in the port to transport the group to Genoa.

The next day the party did not manage to do more than 29 miles or 8 French leagues, passing Nice and getting as far as Villefranche. They arrived so late that they were almost locked out of the town, and the health inspector made many objections to their landing. They left Villefranche on the 29th November in good weather, which alas did not last, and were obliged to stop at Monaco, ‘to show our health papers’, where a strong east wind blew up and prevented them continuing until the afternoon. That allowed for some sightseeing.

Monaco is a small town very well defended because of its situation perched high on a rock, which can only be entered on the port side by a very difficult road cut into the mountain. It is only to the north that a mountain overlooks it, but it is inaccessible. As soon as I arrived I went to say mass in the parish church, after seeking the Grand Vicar’s permission. I then visited the stronghold, where there is nothing remarkable except the palace of the prince, and which is only important because of its pleasant situation. Along the coast we saw two strongholds belonging to the Prince of Monaco, whose territory extends as far as Ventimiglia, which is the first town in Genovese territory (Tachard 1689: 389).

The party took some time on leaving Monaco to go to San Remo, because a sudden south-western storm blew up. The next day before dawn they embarked and passed Oneille (?), ‘a small town in the dependency of the Duke of Savoy, but most agreeable and quite well built’,

where they took refreshments. They slept in a hamlet belonging to Genoa ten leagues from San Remo, which they left at dawn the next day, 30th November. ‘I said mass at Noli when passing by’, Tachard tells us, ‘a town with very few people but which has a bishop’.

After mass and refreshments at Noli, on the outskirts of Savona, the party reboarded their feluccas but it was so late they could not proceed beyond Savona. This place was ‘formerly one of the finest and most populous towns on the Ligurian Riviera, but since the bombardment of Genoa it has been almost entirely dismantled, on orders from the republic.’ After presenting their health papers, they were taken by the son of the French consul to an inn. Tachard paid a visit, accompanied by the consul but not his mandarins, to the Jesuit college which he found in poor condition.

The weather the following day was too bad for them to proceed, but on 2nd December, after saying mass and goodbye to fellow Jesuits, Tachard and his retinue departed for Genoa, where they arrived at one in the afternoon. Having letters of introduction to the French consul Aubert and the king’s envoy extraordinary Dupré, Tachard could not continue as he claims he desired so to do. So, after settling the *khunnang* in an inn, he went to lodge at the Jesuit college, directed by the brother of Cardinal Palavicini. The weather again prevented the party continuing its journey the following day. He claims not to have seen Genoa in spite of spending two days there, but presumably the Siamese mandarins were less constrained by socio-religious obligations and managed to see something of the port, the cathedral, the Palazzo San Giorgio, and the Palazzo Bianco.

On the 4th of December the group left, but not more than four leagues from Genoa heavy rain and strong winds forced it to stop at the hamlet of Camoglio overlooking the sea, with ‘a very pretty and well maintained church.’ As the weather did not improve, Tachard wrote to Monsieur Aubert, the consul, asking for horses and twelve, with three mules, arrived the next day. However, the rain poured down, and the roads were impassable. Furthermore, the road led around a mountain cut into the rock, with a precipice on one side. Men had to be hired to transport their baggage to Rapallo, where they

arrived at night, drenched, and exhausted. Given these dangers, they were persuaded to resume their journey by sea, taking a felucca and a small fishing boat 'hired at an excessive price' to take them only as far as Lerici, although they could have got to Rome for less.

Here Tachard gets his dates wrong, and says in his book that he and his party left Rapallo on 2nd December (it was probably the 6th); they were then taken to another town in the Republic of Genoa, Sestri Levante, where they hired an additional felucca. They ended the day after further bad weather at Vernassale, arriving at night and guided into the port by the flares and cries of the inhabitants. They left as soon as they could, at one in the morning, arriving at Livorno (Leghorn) before the city gates were opened. There the French consul, Cottolendi, and the agent of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, came to the rescue of the travellers, refreshing them with 'preserves and excellent wine' and allowing them some respite.

Livorno is a well-built stronghold with a fine road and a well-sheltered port. The houses are well built, the roads broad and straight. Its agreeable location, in the middle of Italy, makes it extremely populous; it thrives on commerce, is rich, and all the nations of Europe have consuls there. It has a large foreign population, especially of Frenchmen, who, they say, constitute one-ninth of the inhabitants. (Tachard 1689: 388)

Here the group saw the square in front of the port, where there was 'one of the most curious modern objects in Italy'—this was the white marble statue of Prince Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Tuscany, raised some twelve feet on a column and with four bronze fettered slaves at its base, a memorial to the unsuccessful attempt of three Turks and one Moor to seize the galley on which they served.

They stayed in Livorno until the 16th December, and were obviously well entertained there. Proceeding by boat to Piombino, opposite Elba, with its ruined castle, they moved on to Porto-Hercole, a well-defended town within the realms of the King of Spain. But the whole coastline was otherwise unpeopled between Livorno and Civitavecchia, and the air unwholesome. 'One could just see distant woods

and a few villages scattered in the countryside, with towers to give warning, by firing a gun in the daytime or lighting a fire at night, of the appearance of Corsairs on the coast.' That night they reached Civitavecchia, the port for Rome, but so late they again had to stay on board until the next day.

Tachard hurried on to Rome by land, taking up residence at the Jesuit College there, and leaving the Siamese to continue their journey by sea, and come up the Tiber on 21st December¹. The secretary of the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Cibo, sent one of his coaches, a gentleman, and six lackeys to take the mandarins into the city; the French Cardinal d'Estrées also sent horses to greet them, as did the Pope's majordomo, Mgr Visconti. They were lodged in a villa next to the Jesuit College, wined and dined, and given Swiss guards for protection.

The first papal audience took place on 23rd December 1688. Informed about it only 'towards the twenty-second hour', the mandarins and Tachard were taken in coaches to the papal palace. In a procession led by some Jesuits and Roman nobles came Tachard and Cardinal Cibo, the mandarins followed, one carrying the casket containing Narai's letter, another the king's present on a silver tray, and the third 'the gift of the chief minister, Constantine Phaulkon, a Catholic'. Tachard took precedence, and the *khunnang* were largely decorative.

For their audiences, the three mandarins wore the Persian-inspired Siamese court dress;

. . . garments of damask reaching to their knees, which were covered by a longer one of scarlet and ornamented with gold lace of the width of three fingers. They were each girded with a golden belt and at their sides they wore each a dagger with a golden hilt. Their heads were covered with a turban manufactured of the finest white cloth, girded round the head, in the form of a crown, with a solid gold circlet three fingers wide, the whole thing being fastened with a gold cord under their chin'. (Royal Institute 1933: 59)

The two masters of ceremony led the procession into the audience hall, where the Pope was seated on his throne, flanked by eight

cardinals: Ottobone, Chigi, Barberini, Azzolino, Altieri, d'Estrées, Colonna, and Casanate. Narai's letter was placed on a tray and the presents on a table. Tachard, after kissing the Pope's feet (an act from which the Siamese, who would have found it profoundly degrading, were fortunately exempted), addressed the Pope in the hyperbole of the time, to which he added untruths of his own, claiming that the great monarch of Siam

. . . has already begun to receive instruction [in the Catholic faith]. He raises altars and churches to the true God and asks for learned and zealous missionaries . . . very often he grants us lengthy and secret audiences, he honours us to such an extent as to move to jealousy the chief ministers of his sect, whom he formerly venerated even unto superstition. (Royal Institute 1933: 61)

The Pope made a reply, and Tachard took Narai's letter written in Siamese on a sheet of gold from a golden urn embossed in green and red enamel (in all weighing some three pounds), held by a mandarin, and presented it to the Pope. He then presented a translation into Portuguese, which he translated into Italian. Tachard then took the presents from a master of ceremonies to offer them to the Pope: the king's gift was an intricately made octagonal gold casket worked in filagree, weighing about fifteen pounds, and Phaulkon's gift, a silver casket and tray 'adorned with capricious arabesques and leaves', and weighing thirteen pounds.

Phaulkon's letters to the Pope, including one from the minister virulently attacking the Missionaries (see the appendix to Hutchinson 1933: 45–65), were not of course presented at the formal audience, but later in the discussions Tachard had with Vatican officials during his stay.

The mandarins then made their three formal obeisances to the Pope, and remained kneeling until the end of the audience, the Pope spoke again, and then withdrew, leaving the assembled cardinals to admire the Siamese gifts and speak to Tachard and the mandarins in a separate room. The visitors then moved to the chambers of Cardinal Cibo, who granted them audience, and afterwards returned in coaches to their lodgings where 'they were

greeted by the joyful notes of the trumpets of His Holiness' guards'.

Whilst in Rome over Christmas and New Year, they visited the Basilica of St Peter, the Sistine Chapel, and other renowned churches, the church of the Gesù, the city's fountains, the palaces of the Pope's nephew, the Duke of Ceri, Livio Odescalchi, and the Prince and Princess Borghese, and of course the papal palace in the Vatican, where they admired the library, its arsenal, the Belvedere gardens and climbed, after a dinner (i.e. a lunch) offered them there, into the dome of St Peter's. On their last day they were entertained by the Jesuits, and were given 'many dishes of various pastries and sweetmeats' and presented with 'small coffers full of balm and various quintessences'. During their time in Rome, the Vatican court artist Carlo Maratta (1625–1713) took the opportunity of sketching the three Siamese *khunnang*, and these pictures (Figure 1), bearing their names in Siamese characters, are preserved in the Vatican Library; these are the only known illustrations we have of them.²

The *khunnang* were said to be overcome by all that they saw, and announced they were leaving Rome 'with the firm resolution of begging the approval of the King of Siam that they might be able to receive the waters of holy baptism'.

At their farewell audience on 5th January 1689 (Tachard disagrees with the Latin text and gives the date as 4th January) they were assembled with the Tonkinese catechists, who had an audience on 27th December, and received the Pope's blessing. The Pope gave to Tachard three letters, for the King of Siam, his minister, and the Christians of Tonkin. The Pope then gave him a gold medal to present to King Narai, with his portrait on one side and Charity on the other flanked by two children and a Latin tag, 'NON QUAERIT QUAE SUA SUNT' ('She seeketh not her own', I Cor. XII.5); this was studded in diamonds on both sides. More likely to be appreciated by the king (had he still been alive to receive it) was the present of a telescope on its trestle with four crystal lenses. Tachard was given for Phaulkon a small box of rock crystal containing various oils, a picture of the Virgin and Child by Maratta 'decked with a precious frame', and two lapis lazuli rosaries

for himself and his lady. Tachard was given a rosary for himself and the bones of the martyr St Modestus to place in the church in Ayutthaya. The *khunnang* and their attendants were given similar trifles; the mandarins each received 'three very beautiful medallions and three silver ones', some packets of preserves and boxes of fragrances, and their four valets were each given two silver medals. One of the mandarins, in a fit of enthusiasm, had

. . . a life-sized portrait of himself painted in the attitude of holding two golden vases, out of one with the right hand he poured water on a fire, while with the left hand he watered a tender tree with the contents of the other, typifying by the fire the idolatry he desired to see extinguished and by the tree the principle of the Faith he would cultivate in his heart. (Carretto 1944: 186)

It is not known if this commission was completed and, if it were, what became of it. Tachard makes no mention of it, and it may have been a figment of imagination of the Roman memorialist.

The mandarins left Rome on 7th January, arriving at Civitavecchia the following day, where they were received by the governor at the head of the garrison. The 9th, a Sunday, after saying mass, Tachard embarked with the three mandarins on two well-armed Maltese ships for Marseilles.

The French court circular, the *Mercure Galant* (March 1689: 102–45)³, gave details of the journey of the Siamese mandarins to Rome in the company of the Tonkinese catechists and Fr Tachard, the information apparently coming from Tachard's *Second Voyage*. Interestingly the *Mercure Galant* (March 1698: 116) noted that when in Rome 'one of the mandarins was reputed to be the son of the King of Siam, and the others were leading nobles at the court of Siam, and that they had come to be baptized by the Holy Father'. The crowds gathered to see them were so great that the Swiss guards had to keep order.

As soon as possible, on arriving in France, Tachard went to Versailles in February, and was received in audience by Louis XIV, who ratified on 25th February the treaty of commerce Céberet had obtained in 1687. Tachard signed on 1st March nine

articles and conditions agreed on the express order of the most high, most powerful, most excellent and most invincible monarch Louis XIV, by the Grace of God Emperor of France and King of Navarre, with Father Tachard, Jesuit, envoy extraordinary of the most high, most excellent and most invincible monarch the King of Siam. (Archives Nationales C1/25, fo. 18–19)

Two weeks later came a Treaty between Monsieur d'Eragny and Father Tachard concerning the company of the King of Siam's horseguards, in Paris, 15th March 1689, signed by Father Tachard in the name of the King of Siam. The Marquis d'Eragny had been appointed to the post of captain of the palace guard in Ayutthaya as well as inspector-general of French troops in Siam.

The indefatigable Tachard then sought to bring the Société des Missions Etrangères to heel. Louis XIV was persuaded of the need for concord between the French Missionaries and the French Jesuits, whose quarrels in Southeast Asia did little to enhance his authority or the cause of Catholicism. The disputants were brought together by the Archbishop of Paris, Harlay de Champvallon, and agreement reached on 13th March. The Jesuits were to recognize the authority of the apostolic vicars in Tonkin and the apostolic vicars dispensed with the oath of allegiance of the French Jesuits.

But political events in Europe then checked Tachard's Siamese ambitions. The War of the Grand Alliance (1689–1697) broke out, bringing France into conflict with the League of Augsburg, including the Austrian emperor, Sweden, Spain and some German princes, joined by the Netherlands, Savoy, and England. French ships were needed closer to home, and, as the season for sailing to Asia passed, further reinforcements for Siam were deferred until 1690.

But what of the Siamese mandarins while Tachard was busy hobnobbing with the court? We know remarkably little, for unlike the ambassadors of 1686–7, they caused little comment. The two memorialists of the period, Dagneau and Sourches, made no mention of their presentation at court or of their subsequent doings. The Siamese were no

longer the talk of the town; their social novelty had passed. Sourches did indicate on 24th July 1688 the arrival of the *Oiseau* (on which Forbin and Céberet returned from Siam) and mentions something of the affairs of Siam, and on 4th August 1688 mentioned the arrival of M. de La Loubère, the king's envoy to Siam, at Brest, but says nothing about the reception of the mandarins at the French court the following year. Dangeau also on 24th July 1688 mentioned the return of the expedition to Siam, but also passes over in silence the reception at Versailles which appears to have taken place in February.

The *Mercure Galant*, so full of the activities of their predecessors in 1686, hardly mentioned the mandarins in 1689. Siamese affairs received a résumé in the March gazette (1689: 99–102) probably because of the audience recently granted the mandarins by Louis XIV, though the date and details are not given. Mention, however, was made of all the presents being sent by the King of Siam to the members of the royal house. The accompanying mandarins are not named, but one Racan is again mentioned as being in the mandarins' suite. Racan had accompanied the earlier Siamese embassy of 1686 and had said to his interpreter, the Abbé de Lionne, on witnessing Louis XIV at dinner: 'If I knew French I would speak to him, for his goodness appears so great that I think it greater than would be my boldness'. (Donneau de Vizé 1687, Vol II: 265). The *Mercure Galant* (March 1689: 146) continues:

When they returned [to France], they had an audience with His Majesty, not having had it before their departure from Paris for Rome because the king was at Fontainebleau and Monseigneur the Dauphin in Germany. As the King of Siam desires to have a company of Frenchmen for his palace bodyguard, one was formed and the command given by His Majesty to M. d'Eragny.

Indeed, almost as much notice abroad appears to have been made of the Siamese mandarins' activities as in France. The correspondent of *The London Intelligence* noted from Paris on 1st February 1689 (Anderson 1890: 368):

The Sieurs Mandarins have had a private audience of the King at Versailles. T. [sic] Tachard, a Jesuit, there presented his Majesty with a Letter from the King of Spain (evidently a misprint for Siam), and Complimented him in the name of the Prince. The Mandarins at their entrance and going out, made the usual Salutations by prostrating themselves after the mode of their Countrey.

However, the date of 1st February for the report is suspect, and is more likely to be 1st March 1689 since Anderson (1890: 368) also noted that the *Harlem Currant* [sic] No.2 14–19 for February 1689 carried the notice:

Our letters from Paris of the 21st Instant, give the following Account (viz.) that the Siamites [sic] Ambassadors had their first Audience being conducted on the king's coaches from Paris to Versailles, to whom they kneeled down and prostrated themselves, Father Tachart a Jesuit, Interpreted their Speech and Letter of Credence, and informed his Majestie of the Multitude of Christians the Jesuits have made in Siam, their Lodging is at the Hottel [sic] of Extraordinary Ambassadors, in the Fauxbourg St. Germain.

There is much to be questioned in this account, proving perhaps no more than that newspapers in the seventeenth century were as inaccurate as some more recent ones. As far as is known, the mandarins, who were not ambassadors, bore no letter of credence, and Tachard, not knowing Siamese, was in no position to interpret them (for this reason Moriset accompanied them as interpreter). The Jesuits were not known to have made many conversions in Siam other than Phaulkon himself, and it was the Missionaries who sought converts among the masses, if without great success (though Tachard is unlikely to have mentioned the Missionaries in a favourable light). The Hôtel des Ambassadeurs was specifically in the Rue de Tournon. Then there is again the problem of the date; the audience may well have taken place on 21st February, and the *Harlem Currant* dated itself a week in advance, as some periodicals do today.

Dutch gazettes, however, from July started to carry disturbing news concerning events in

Siam, which the French dismissed as deliberate disinformation. But it was confirmed on 5th November 1689 by the news brought by French survivors of the 'revolution' of 1688 in Siam on their release from incarceration in the prisons of Middelburg: Phaulkon was murdered, Narai was dead, Petracha reigned, French troops expelled. Dagneau in his memoirs speaks of the news of the revolution in Siam on 5th November 1689, and Souches of the 'events' in Siam on 6th November 1689. The *Mercure Galant* (November 1689: 320–2) also mentions the news of the revolution in Siam and French prisoners from there in Holland, and gave details of the revolution in the December issue (1689: 28–54).

The news reached Tachard when he was at Saumur; the departure of French ships for Siam was again deferred. Tachard was in Port-Louis on 18th November, probably arranging for the shipment of goods to Siam on French Company vessels, and then went to Brest to break the news to his three tame mandarins, presumably waiting there for the departure of French Navy ships. They were not excessively disturbed, and held that Narai was a harsh and feared ruler; the sister of one of the mandarins was married to the nephew of the new ruler; Petracha's son was thought by them capable and fond of mathematics. By this stage all three had been sufficiently exposed to Catholicism and were baptised in the Jesuit church in Brest; Launay (1920: 93) inaccurately maintains that only two were baptised in Brest, as the third had died en route (he was not to die until 10th March 1690). They were apparently retained in Brest until the departure of the Duquesne-Guiton fleet on 25th February 1690 for Siam—which it never reached.

Ok-muen Phiphit had the misfortune to die on board the *Gaillard* on 10th March, and was given a six gun salute to 'honour appropriately the first Siamese mandarin to die a Christian'. (Vongsuravatana 1992: 157). He possibly died from the heat off Cape Verde, which was excessive even for a Siamese (confirmed by Challe), rather than from a marked addiction, like his colleagues, to French wine, which Challe also noted.

How are they going to make shift when they are back in their country where no wine is produced,

they who swallowed it so cordially in Paris, and with whom I drank so copiously in Port-Louis? How will they survive without our wines from Bordeaux and Graves? I do not know. But love of one's neighbour requires me to pity them, because I should be pitied in their place (Challe 1979: 61).

The squadron anchored at the Cape Verde and the Comoros islands, and Pondichéry. There, the director of the French East Indies Company, François Martin, noted in August 1690, 'The Rev. Fr Tachard and M. Charms embarked on the squadron in the hope that M. Dusuquesne gave them of reaching Mergui. Fr Tachard only took with him the Siamese who were returning from France' (Martin 1934: III, 113). The squadron continued to Balassor, near the mouth of the Ganges, but, because of unfavourable winds, never reached the Siamese port of Mergui; instead, it hung around the Negrades for weeks when the crews died in large numbers of tropical diseases and scurvy. When battles took place, Tachard 'prudently remained with the two mandarins at the bottom of the hold' (Lanier 1883: 183). Finally Mergui was abandoned as a destination in favour of returning to Balassor. Ok-khun Wiset and Ok-khun Chamnan were off-loaded at Balassor at a date between 4th and 30th December, when the *Gaillard* with the rest of the Duquesne-Guiton squadron docked to take on supplies and land their many sick; the Siamese were given a five gun French salute as they left to take 'a Moorish vessel', according to Lanier (1883: 183). Martin, writing in January 1691, is less specific: 'The Rev Fr Tachard left at Balassor the Siamese he had brought from France for them to travel to Merguy or Siam [Ayutthaya] when the first chance arose' (Martin 1934 III: 137). Challe, citing Martin, said they took either a Dutch or a Portuguese ship to Mergui (Challe 1979: 442–3), instead of leaving them in Pondichéry to take a French vessel to Mergui.

From the Siamese port the mandarins travelled overland to Ayutthaya, bearing a grovelling letter from Tachard to the new *phra klang*, Kosa Pan. It is possible that the Siamese might have considered that the two surviving mandarins sent to Europe in 1688 were being held hostage by the French; after all, Desfarges

had retained two Siamese hostages on withdrawing from Bangkok in 1688, and did not release them until the end of 1689 during his pointless expedition to Phuket. Writing in January or February 1692, Martin noted the arrival of a reply to Tachard's letter after the return of the two Siamese; it is true, they were carrying Tachard's letter, but the precedent for hostage-taking existed. The envoy sent from Kosa Pan, the *phra khlung*, to Martin in Pondichéry,

. . . was a V. Pinheiro, a native of Siam but a Christian, who had been an interpreter with the gentlemen of the Mission and then with the [French] Company; the King of Siam had raised him to the rank of [blank: Ok-luang Worowathi] to authorize his despatch; he had two mandarins as deputies and some valets. He had been sent on the return to Ayutthaya of the Siamese whom the Rev. Fr Tachard had left in Bengal and who had subsequently proceeded thereto. These persons had been charged with a letter for the *barcalon* which the Rev. Fr had written, in which he noted that he was charged with a letter from the Holy Father the Pope for the late King [Narai] and another from the King [Louis XIV] for the same monarch, that they had been written before it was known that His Majesty had died, and he had kept them to hand them over to the present monarch when the occasion arose for him to travel in safety to Ayutthaya. (Martin 1934: III 185)

Kosa Pan's reply was not forthcoming; the moment for Tachard's return was not opportune.

Thereafter Ok-khun Chamnan and Ok-khun Wiset pass out of history. It is not known if they met Tachard nine years later when the court at Ayutthaya finally condescended to receive the Jesuit, who presented a ten-year-old letter from Louis XIV addressed to Phra Narai, dead for nearly twelve years, and, according to Vongsuravatana (1992: 190), a letter from Pope Innocent XI, similarly addressed, and who had died ten years earlier. It is to be hoped that Kosa Pan, as *phra khlung*, had informed Phetracha that Tachard had indicated in his letters that His Holiness had died in 1689, and the king did not make the customary enquiry about the pontiff's health.

Thus, unlike the reign of King Narai which ended with an explosive change, the king's last mission to Europe fizzled out, with nothing to show for it except scattered references and a few memorabilia deposited in Vatican archives. So ended the astonishing flurry of diplomatic exchanges with the West in the seventeenth century.

Notes

¹ There exist seven versions of their stay in Rome. Tachard gives one in Book Eight of his *Second Voyage* "translated from the Italian and printed in Rome" but in which the translator, probably Tachard himself, omitted and added points, given "our taste and knowledge of the Siamese". The original Italian texts were undoubtedly those printed by Ercole; the first, dated 1688 and claimed to be a "letter written from Rome to Signor N.N.", describes in fifteen pages the arrival of the Siamese and their audience with Pope Innocent XI on 23rd December; the second, dated 1689, gives an account of eight pages listing the activities of mandarins in Rome and their farewell audience with the pope on 5th January 1689. The Vatican Library also possesses an unpublished manuscript version of the first audience. A version in German relating the first audience was published in Prague in 1689 (*Audienz seiner Heiligkeit Innocentii XI, so der Tachard, Jesuiten, Und andern Gersandten des Königs in Siam dem 23 December 1688 verstattet worden. Nebst Erzehlung, was bey deren Einholung in Rom fügegangen*).

There are two translations into English of the Ercole texts. The earliest, published in 1933 on the occasion of the cremation of H.R.H. Princess Dibyalankar in Bangkok, was also translated into Thai, and reprinted in Sakhon Nakhon in 1967. The second was published in 1944 in the *Journal of the Thailand Research Society* (the name of the *Journal of the Siam Society* under the wartime Phibul regime) by Rev. Fr Carretto and reprinted in 1959 in Vol VII of *Selected Articles from JSS*; this however appears to summarize the first Ercole text and reproduces most of the second text.

² Reproduced in the *Chronicle of Twenty-five Years of Thai-Vatical relations* (1994: 23) and reproduced here as Figure 1 with permission.

³ I must here record my gratitude to Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h for kindly checking the *Mercure Galant* and the memoirs of Dagneau and Sourches in the

Bibliothèque Nationale for the references cited in relation to the 1688–90 Siamese mission.

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