



THE FIRST PRINTED SENTENCE IN THAI: A.D. 1646

Luigi Bressan

In all texts discussing Thai literature we read that the first printed book in Thai, in Romanized characters (*Thai-wat*), was a catechism of the Catholic doctrine published in 1796, with the title *Kham Son Christang Phae Ton*. This work was printed in Bangkok by the French missionary Bishop Arnaud Garnault,¹ who had nurtured the idea since 1787, when he was in Pondichery.

Already in 1674 the French Missionary Father Langlois² wrote from Ayutthaya to his superiors in Paris, asking to be provided with the means of printing books in the Siamese language. He asserted that the other Missionaries had already a printing press in their Missions.³ He was referring to the Jesuits who were publishing books in local languages in India, Japan, Philippines and China since the end of the previous century. However the request of Fr Langlois was not granted by Paris, and the coup d'état of 1688, with subsequent restrictions on the work of the Christian missionaries in Siam, put an end to that project, even though Kosa Pan, as first ambassador of King Narai to Louis XIV, on visiting the royal printery when in Paris in 1687, expressed the desire that printing in Thai be introduced into Siam.⁴ Texts with Siamese characters were first printed in 1835 by the American Missionary Dan Beach Bradley, followed soon by the Assumption Press.

However, there exists a short Siamese sentence printed as early as 1646 by the Jesuits. The Company of Jesus was founded in 1540 by Ignatius de Loyola and quite soon many young priests from Europe adhered to its spiritual ideals, spreading over different parts of the world, and setting up religious houses in Europe, America, and Asia, establishing an international network. To express visually its

¹ Arnaud Garnault (1745–1811, dying in Chantabun), worked in the mission in Siam from 1772; he was expelled from Siam on the orders of Phya Tak (Taksin) on 1 December 1779, and went to Pondichery. He returned to Siam, after working in Kedah, under the Chakri dynasty.

² Of the Missions Etrangères in Paris. Pierre Langlois was in Siam from 1671–1680 working first in the college in Ayutthaya, and then 1677–78 in the mission in Phitsanulok.

³ In his letter of 30 December 1674, urging the sending of a printery to Siam, he wrote “Paper comes from China very cheaply. Ink costs virtually nothing. Learning to print and even make letters is easy. The Chinese, Tonkinese and Cochinchinese are capable of doing anything they can witness being done.”

⁴ See L. Bressan, *A Meeting of Worlds*, Bangkok, Assumption University Press, 2000, pp.101–113 and 121–125.

unity and its ramifications, many attempts were made since the foundation of the Order. As the shape of a tree was already the favourite way for showing family genealogies, the well-known Jesuit geographer and mathematician Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680)⁵ drew a tree showing all the Jesuit houses of the world on the occasion of the election of the new General Superior, Fr Vincent Carafa⁶ in 1646. Saint Ignatius is seen kneeling at the base of the tree holding the Jesuit Constitutions in his hands, with the background opening onto a seascape of sailing vessels taking Jesuits to the farthest regions of the globe. The lower part of the trunk represents the Italian Assistancy, the upper part the German. Smaller branches terminate in leaves bearing the names of towns in which Jesuit schools were located. The lushness of the tree coupled with the harmonious integration of the trunk reflect the conception of the Society of Jesus held by Kircher.⁷

The Jesuits by 1646 were already a globalized reality with 45 “provinces” each with several communities. In Asia we can find the Provinces of China, Malabar (with a house in Pegu), Japan, and Goa, totalling 28 houses. Unfortunately for an historical documentation Siam does not appear in this list.

That does not mean that the Jesuits had neglected Siam. The Portuguese Father Balthasar Sequeira sojourned in Ayutthaya between 1607 and 1609, followed by other Jesuits. In 1626 Father Antonio Francisco Cardim tried to establish a permanent residence in the “Portuguese village” (*Ban Farang* or *Ban Portuges*). He had to leave the country because he was appointed by his Superiors to other duties, and his successor Father Giulio Cesare Margico was put in jail, where he died in 1630. Jesuit activity in Siam was interrupted until 1656, when a new house was opened by the Sicilian Fr Thomas Valguarnera. He was a very talented man, who started a school and quite soon received from the king the title of *Engineer to the Crown* for his dedication in building the fortifications of Ayutthaya, Bangkok and Lopburi. He died in Siam in 1677.⁸

⁵ Kircher was born in Fulda and spent part of his life in Avignon (France); after 1635 he resided in Rome. He published several books on Egyptian history, on medicine, mathematics, geology etc. One of his best known publications is the *China monumentis qua sacris qua profanis illustrata* (China illustrated by religious and secular monuments), Rome 1667. He maintained a large correspondence with all the Missionaries of his time. The Archives of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome have 114 volumes of letters addressed to him. Many have never been published.

⁶ Vincent Carafa was born on 9 May 1585 and elected as the seventh General Superior of the Company of Jesus on 7 January 1646. He died in Rome in 1649.

⁷ This description is adapted from S.J. Harris, *The Jesuits. Yearbook 2002, Rome 2002*, 16.

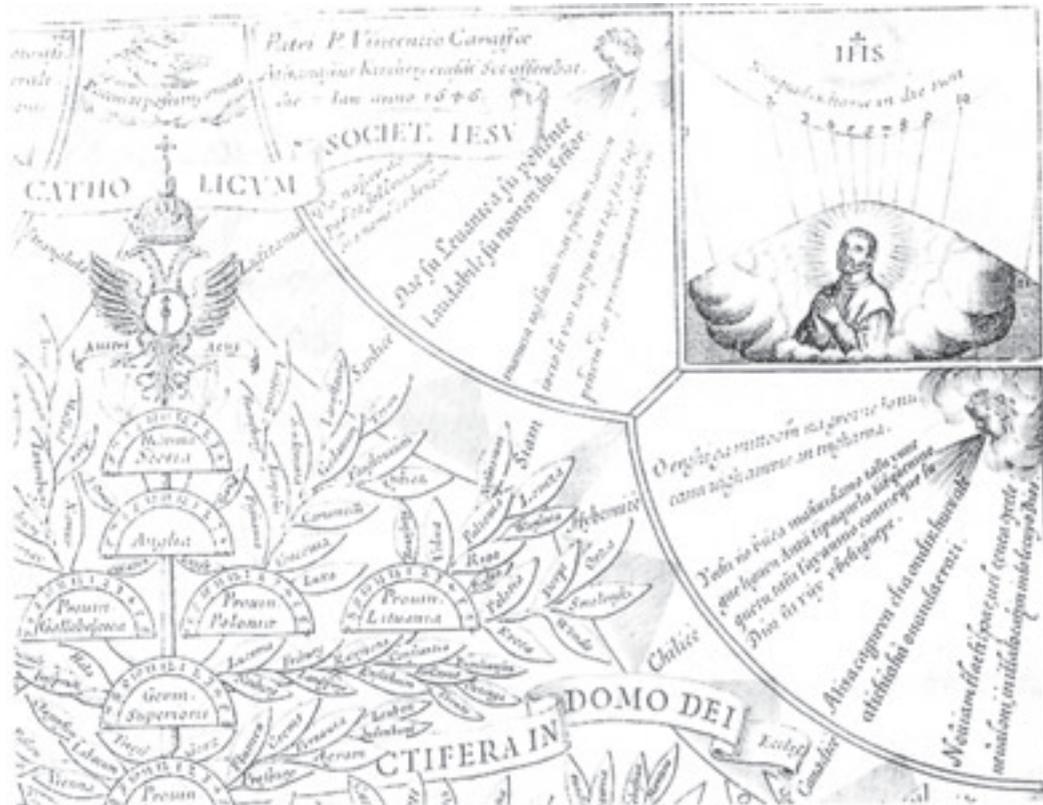
⁸ See L. Bressan, *A Meeting of Worlds*, op. cit., pp. 3–21; G. Gnolfo, *Un missionario assorino: Tomaso dei Conti Valguarnera S.J. 1609–1677*, Catania 1974; M. Teixeira, *Portugal na Thailândia*, Macau 1983, pp. 352–400 about the Jesuits in Siam. The Jesuits remained in the church of St Paul until the destruction of Ayutthaya. Father Valguarnera also compiled a dictionary of Thai language, but no copy has been traced.

We understand now why in 1646 no Jesuit house is listed in Siam. But reference to Siam there is not lacking. The huge genealogical tree depicted by Kircher is surrounded by the sentence “*From East to West praiseworthy is the name of Our Lord*”, a sentence which comes from the first verse of the 50th Psalm in the Bible. It is printed in 34 languages, often with the alphabetical characters of the language. That is the case for Syrian, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Coptic, three Indian languages, Chinese etc. There are also translations of the sentence into some American languages, into Irish, Scottish and Basque (with its own alphabet).⁹

The Romanized Siamese sentence, near the word “Siam” in the upper right hand corner, reads / *Manusa tag lai aiu nai pendin sarason / iocio le vai tan pu nam tag fa le tag / pendin dai promahanacora chu Deus /* which should be more correctly, in modern transcription: *Manut thang lai yu nai phaendin sarasin / yön yo læ vai than phu nan thang fa le thang / phaendin doi pranamakorn khü Deus.*

In Thai, this reads:

มนุษย์ทั้งหลายอยู่ในแผ่นดินสรรเสริญเยินยอและไหว้ท่านผู้
ทั้งฟ้าและทั้งแผ่นดินโดยพระนามกร คือ พระเจ้า (Deus)



⁹ The print is in A. Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis at Umbrae*, ed. Ludovigo Grignani, Rome, 1646, 553.

It is to be wondered who in Rome could help Kircher with a Siamese text. There is no doubt that the most likely person is Fr Antonio Francisco Cardim, who stayed in Siam between 1626 and 1629 and was in Rome between 1645 and 1649. There he published a book, in 1645, about the Jesuit Province in Japan, *Relazione della Provincia del Giappone*,¹⁰ which also included South-East Asia, with some pages on Siam. He could draw on personal experience, on letters coming from the Missionaries, on books published about Asia. He had some knowledge also about the Siamese history, which he probably obtained from the chronicles, for he commented positively on the veracity of Fernão Mendes Pinto's pages on Siam as they appeared in the *Peregrinação*¹¹. Moreover, the Jesuits in Rome were in constant correspondence with their houses around the world and particularly with Macau, the house of reference for China, Japan and South-east Asia. In those years the Augustinian Father Sebastian Manrique was also staying in Rome; he had been active in several Asian countries between 1628 and 1642. In 1648 he published a book in the "Eternal City" on different Asian kingdoms, including Siam.¹² Already Siam had a place in the world vision of Europe.

¹⁰ The full title is *Relation della Provincia del Giappone, scritta dal Padre Antonio Francesco Cardim della Compagnia di Gesù, Procuratore di quella Provincia. Alla Santità di Nostro Signore Innocenzo X*, Stamperia Fei, Roma 1645 (pp. 150–156 concern Siam). The Portuguese Cardim was not the first Missionary to publish about Siam, as the Franciscan Father Marcelo de Ribandeneira had devoted some pages to Siam in his *Historia de las Islas de Archipelago y Reynos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cuchincina, Malaca, Siam, Camboxa y Iappon*, Barcelona 1601 (with the chapters 20–25 of the second part dedicated to Siam). Some references are present also in the Dominican Father Gabriel (Quiroga) de San Antonio, *Breve y verdadera relacion de los sucesos del Reyno de Camboxa. Al rey Don Felipe, nuestro Señor*, Valladolid 1604 (see part 2, chapter 2,5). More can be found in the book of the Italian Jesuit Cristoforo Borri, *Relazione della nuova missione delli PP. della Compagnia di Giesu al Regno di Cocincina*, Roma 1631 (see pp. 7, 9, 91, 201–209, 222–227). Cardim also published three other books in Rome between 1646 and 1648 as well as one in Lisbon in 1643 and another in 1650, all five dealing with the Christian martyrs in Japan. After returning to Asia and before his death in 1659 he prepared another major work *Batalhas da Companhia de Jesus na sua Província de Japão*, which remained unpublished until 1894 at Lisbon. In this he deals with Siam on pp. 286–290.

¹¹The *Peregrinação* was published firstly in Lisbon in 1614 and appeared in many successive editions. Cardim could also have consulted the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires (who visited Siam in 1516), the *Decadas da Asia* of João Barros, and the *Historia do descobrimento* of Fernao Lopes de Castanheda, published in Venice in 1577, among other works.

¹² *Breve relatione dei Regno de Pegù, e Arracan, e Brama, e degli Imperij del Calaminan, Siamom, e Gran Mogor* (Short report about the kingdoms of ... and empires of Calaminan, Siam...).