

“LOW” Maps of Siam*

*Larry Sternstein***

On the 3rd of April 1824, the Secretary to Government of Prince of Wales Island (now Penang) received from Lieutenant James Low, Commandant of the Local Corps, an outsize sheet of paper on which was drawn a map of “Siam Camboja & Laos” (approximately 94 × 67 centimeters) accompanied by a letter in which the maker of the map underlined his outlays:

I have the honour to forward to you for the purpose of being laid before the Honorable the Governor in Council a Map of Siam, Camboja and Laos, which was first completed by me in the year 1822 from a large mass of original, and I firmly believe, authentic Native Plans, & Itineraries, and oral information, and which I have since that period amended and enlarged.

The constant resort to this Island of Siamese^a [marginal note: (a) independent of the numerous Siamese settlers on it.] and of Natives of other Indo Chinese Countries, has enabled me in a very satisfactory manner to submit these Plans and Papers to ample and repeated tests — without which advantage I should scarcely have ventured to submit them among the materials for the construction of the Map^b. [marginal note: (b) Sir William Jones observes generally “that all asiatic Nations must be far better acquainted with their several Countries than mere European Scholars and travellers” (Discourse X Asiatic Researches.)] The fact that existing Maps of the World exhibit the Countries alluded to nearly as a blank, was a certain [?] incentive to my attempt. But I was also aware that unless the entire confidence of the Natives could be gained little information of value was to be expected from them. My attention was therefore directed to the operose preliminary task of studying

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the *Thai* or *Siamese* language — a task which the total absence of any Elementary Works rendered peculiarly irksome. The (I allow limited) knowledge which I thus acquired of that language became of the most essential Service, as it enabled me at the outset to overcome the scruples of the natives, to detect error and to obviate a hazardous and blind reliance upon Interpreters.

With what success my endeavours have been followed it does not become me to determine. But it may be allowed me to remark that I have not spared years of unwearied and cautious Research or grudged that precuniary outlay without which it is well known that Investigations of this kind cannot be carried on in India, in order to render the Map of Geographical Utility — and that, if great precision, which the very nature and manner of this investigation precluded, has not been attained, yet that I indulge a hope, and do believe, that a justness has been preserved in all the principal outlines and features and that the sites have been disposed with relative correctness at the least. Where geometrical data have been so scantily afforded it may seem no small object gained if in this Map an approximation even has been made to the truth. I can safely add that a desire after truth has implicitly guided me all along.

The chief already known positions on which the construction of this Map of Siam hinges are — Prince of Wales Island [Penang] — Keddah [Kedah] — Tavay [Tavoy] — Patani — Ligor [Nakhon Si Thammarat] — Ayoothaya [Ayutthaya], and Chanthaboon [Chanthaburi] — For Camboja [Cambodia] — its Capital as laid down in Modern Maps and the embouchure of its grand river — For Laos — the two Capitals of Lanchang [Luang Prabang] — and Chering Mai [Chiang Mai].

The Geographical Memoir to which the Map will afterwards be an accompaniment is nearly arranged. But before bringing it forward it seems highly desirable that it should be collated with the scattered Notices, which I learn, have been offered by Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Indo Chinese Countries visited by them. As the works which, it has been stated to me, contain these notices, are not in our Library and are indeed very rare in India, some delay

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becomes unavoidable. Besides, it is my intention to elucidate the Memoir by many individual Plans and Drawings of which I have not yet got duplicates made.

In the mean time a Copy of the Map will perhaps prove a useful accompaniment to the first Part of An Inquiry into the History, Religion and Literature etc etc of Siam, which I have been preparing with the view of sending it for publication either to England or to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta.

May I now solicit, that should the Honble Board deem this Map of value sufficient to justify its being made public, they may be pleased to adopt the methods which seem best adapted to promote that object.

P.W. Island
3rd April 1824

I have etc etc etc

James Low
Lieut 23rd Regiment Madras
N.I. and Commandant of the
P.W. Island Local Corps

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April 1824, pages 437-441.)

This extraordinary submission was immediately laid before the Governor of Prince of Wales Island who was moved to record a Minute on the 5th of April 1824:

It is with no common feelings of satisfaction that I have to draw the notice of my Colleagues to the accompanying Map of Siam, Camboja and Laos, Countries exhibited nearly as a blank in every Chart hitherto published, which Lieutenant Low has prepared after some years laborious study and investigation of the Siamese Language and various authentic Native Plans, Itineraries and other means of information both written and oral. I recommend that a Copy of this Map be transmitted by the first opportunity to our Honorable Masters, and that another Copy be forwarded the Supreme Government apprising it at the same time of the fact so creditable to Lieutenant Low that unassisted by any Elementary works or prospect of pecuniary reward he has succeeded in acquiring a greater proficiency in the Siamese or Thai language than perhaps any other European in India.

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He is capable of reading and writing the Character with great ease and fluency and of conversing and interpreting in that tongue in a manner fully competent to conduct a direct correspondence with the Siamese Authorities, as I have myself lately had occasion to witness.

It has been my pride and anxiety whilst at the head of the Government to do everything in my power to encourage the acquisition of information respecting the situation and condition of the Countries surrounding us, not only for the purpose of science, but because I am well aware that such information will afford the best means for enabling us to diffuse among our ruder and less fortunate fellow Creatures the blessings of useful knowledge and the comforts of civilized life, — objects which I conceive all men in high station and particularly those in India should never lose sight of.

Whatever may be the opinions of Geographical Scholars as to the critical accuracy of Lieutenant Low’s Map, there can be no doubt that this work and his promised Memoir of the History, Religion, Literature etc of Siam will place before the Government a Mass of useful and most authentic information regarding the extraordinary race which has lately over-run [?] Kedah and established itself in our vicinity, information by which we may soon be called upon to regulate or improve our mutual intercourse. But, My Honorable Masters have ever been foremost in encouraging the acquisition of Oriental tongues, and in proportion as the language was intricate and difficult of attainment has their munificence been displayed. I do therefore conscientiously believe that if this Board with its highest approbation tender to Lieutenant Low a Donation of 2000 Dollars as a remuneration not only for his Map and Memoir, but for having attained so creditable a Knowledge of the Siamese or Thai language, we shall act in the spirit of our generous Employers, and at the same time do an honor to ourselves, and holdforth a lasting incentive to useful diligence and to the exertions of modest and unassuming Merit.

5 April 1824

W.E. Phillips

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April 1824, pages 442–445.)

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Shortly thereafter, on the 9th of April 1824, a Senior Member of the Council of Prince of Wales Island, minuted his seconding of the sentiments of the Governor:

I cordially join with the Honorable the President [Governor] in acknowledging the eminent Merits of Lieutenant Low who has prosecuted so long so indefatigably, and so successfully the study of the Language, Literature, Religion and Geography of Siam — Points of the utmost importance and which will tend to place the Government on an independent footing with respect to Communications with any Siamese Authority. Lieutenant Low does not assume the Merit of Critical accuracy in the preparation of the Chart which he has submitted, but I have long known how indefatigable he has been in obtaining the materials for framing it, with the view of giving some reasonable Idea of the surrounding Countries and the very Circumstance of that Gentleman being the only European on the Island who has hitherto made that difficult Language his peculiar study and devoted himself to it with a perseverance and success which are most highly creditable seems to me to require that especial Notice should be taken of it, as a reward for his own Exertions and an incentive to the public Servants of this Establishment to the same laudable pursuits.

The Honorable the Presidents [Governor's] Sentiments and recommendation are therefore entirely concurred in by me.

9th April 1824

W.A. Clubley

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April 1824, pages 446–447.)

Accordingly, it was

Ordered in conformity with the President's [Governor's] Minute that Copies of the Map be transmitted by the first opportunity to the Honorable the Court of Directors and to the Supreme Government, that Lieutenant Low be so acquainted, and that the distinguished approbation of Government be conveyed to him, not only for the Map, but for his highly meritorious acquirement of the Siamese or Thai language, evidence of which he so amply afforded both in writing and interpreting fluently during several long conferences between the Governor and some Envoys deputed by the Rajah of Ligore [Nakhon Si Thammarat].

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Resolved further as a reward for such useful diligence, and an encouragement to complete the Memoir of the History, Religion and Literature of Siam, which he is now preparing, that the sum of 2,000 Dollars be also tendered to Lieutenant Low as a Donation from Government.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April, 1824, pages 447–448.)

The Secretary to Government transmitted the sentiments of the Governor to Lieutenant Low precisely in a lengthy, laudatory letter dated 19th April 1824 which ended

...the Governor in Council has resolved on tendering to you a Donation of 2,000 Dollars, and I am directed to acquaint you that the Paymaster has been authorized accordingly to disburse that sum to you.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April 1824, pages 451–452.)

Two thousand dollars (“Spanish” specie) was a handsome sum; Low, a Lieutenant in the Madras Native Infantry, would have been paid such an amount in little less than a year, even with his emoluments as Commandant of the Prince of Wales Island Local Corps.¹ The Honorable William Edward Phillips, Governor of Prince of Wales Island and Its Dependencies, to whom the map of “Siam Camboja & Laos” is dedicated, certainly was impressed with Lieutenant Low’s accomplishments. The Honorable John Macalister, Magistrate and Senior Member of the Council of the Presidency of Prince of Wales Island, certainly was not impressed with the accomplishments of Lieutenant Low, though he minuted this sentiment with a deal of circumspection:

I am sorry I cannot concur in the sentiments contained in the Honorable Presidents [Governor’s] Minute of this date, respecting the merits of Lieutenant Low’s Map etc and hope I may not be called upon to give my sentiments more at large.

5 April 1824

J. Macalister

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations,

1. See Singh, Major M.P., *Indian Army Under the East India Company*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1976; particularly pages 98–102.

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15 April 1824, page 445.)

John Macalister's circumspection may be laid to the "many estimable qualities which adorned his character", he being "possessed in a pre-eminent degree [with] all the genuine qualities...which characterise the Natives of its Isles (the Hebrides) from whence he derived a high descent: Brave, open, charitable, unsuspecting, benevolent and kind hearted to all mankind and nobly generous even to his enemies";² or to the fact that he had been "severely reprimanded by the authorities at home" for having once challenged a fellow magistrate to fight a duel.³ His reasons for dissent from the opinion of the Governor on Lieutenant Low's Map cannot be so readily laid, though the Honorable W.A. Clubley's written seconding of the Governor's sentiments implies it was the accuracy of the map submitted by Lieutenant Low which led Mr Macalister to demur.

The map "Siam Camboja & Laos" despite being of a large size is in places barely readable for being congested with place names, most of which it appears, are transliterated according to a formula based on the way they sounded when pronounced to Lieutenant Low; this formula being known to him alone. That the map may be "seen", it is here reproduced under three themes: the first (Figure 1) carries the title of the map and shows all landform features (excepting a few vague indications of hills), major inter- and intra-country areas named, and routes; the second (Figure 2) shows all "centres" but names only major ones; the third (Figure 2) shows all intra-country areas named. Not shown are a number of notes which allude in the main to cultural features.

Although representing a motley assemblage of information from sources diverse, "Siam Camboja & Laos" proffers more topographical information about the Siamese kingdom than do all previous maps of the area. Its maker makes only a qualified claim for accuracy, however, and rightly so for the map is almost entirely based on hearsay. Lieutenant Low had not stood on Siamese soil or, in fact, on much

2. Obituary of John Macalister Esq. under "Deaths" *Prince of Wales Island Gazette*, Wednesday, October 13, 1824, front page.

3. Garnier, Rev. K., "Early Days in Penang" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 1, Number 87, April 1923, pages 10-11.

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of the mainland even in the immediate vicinity of Prince of Wales Island.⁴ He admits to collecting what topographical information he could about “Siam Camboja & Laos” almost wholly from sources on Prince of Wales Island. That these sources were biased in their areal coverage is obvious. Lieutenant Low could be faulted for not pointing to this shortcoming of his map, but it is unlikely Mr. Macalister would have withheld his commendation for such an oversight. Lieutenant Low does lay claim to his map having a “justness...in all the principal outlines and features and that the sites have been disposed with relative correctness at the least”.⁵ With hindsight, this claim clearly is untrue (compare Figures 1 and 2 with Figure 3) but for Mr. Macalister to record his conviction to the contrary on this account would require certain knowledge of the falseness of this claim in 1824. What might Mr. Macalister have known?

It is unlikely Mr. Macalister was certain that many of the sites shown on the map were not “disposed with relative correctness” — though he did possess “extensive knowledge of the Revenue and Commercial affairs of the Eastern part of India”⁶ — because no source other than the map itself contained even half as many sites. It is possible Mr. Macalister was aware of shortcomings in the “original Native Materials” used in the disposition of sites on the map, for his “easiness of access and peculiar gentleness and graciousness of manner with the Native populations, had created among them a stronger attachment to him than has ever possibly been experienced by any other Person in a similar Situation”.⁷ He could not be certain

4. Several months after submitting “Siam Camboja & Laos”, the First Anglo-Burmese War began and Lieutenant Low did get to set foot in Siam as envoy from the Governor of Prince of Wales Island to the Raja of Ligor (now Nakhon Si Thammarat); see Low, J., “Extracts from the Journal of a Political Mission to the Raja of Ligor in Siam” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Volume 7, 1838, pages 583–608. The Lieutenant commissioned a Thai artist to draw, in pencil on European paper, the scene of his reception by the Raja from his description *ibidem*. This charming drawing is included in a unique album of Thai drawings which, according to a leaflet entitled “Thai Manuscripts” which accompanied an exhibition in the British Library 23 January–30 June 1983, “is the only known Thai example of Company School painting, that is, painting commissioned from local artists by officials of the East India Company”. Item 3 in the exhibition was “Reception of James Low by the young prince of Nakhon Sithammarat in 1824, with dancers and masked drama. Add. 27370, f.17.”
5. Letter from Lieutenant James Low to the Secretary to Government of Prince of Wales Island, “Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations” 15 April 1824, page 439.
6. Obituary of John Macalister Esq., *op.cit.*
7. *Ibid.*

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of the falseness of these “original Native Materials” in this regard, however, and it is unlikely Lieutenant Low would have been taken in by a native informant’s flight of fancy or purposeful untruth (even in conspiracy) of which Mr. Macalister was apprised.

Reason for Mr. Macalister’s censure, however circumspect, of Lieutenant Low’s map seems more likely to be found in his knowledge of some gross unjustness in its “principal outlines and features” than in its inaccurate disposition of sites. Lieutenant Low himself gives reason for less than three cheers for the lineaments of his map in its pedigree:

The *Outline* of this Map has *chiefly* been taken from D’Anvilles Atlas. The latitudes and longitudes of the principal places upon which the construction of the Map depends have been mostly laid down according to more recent Geographers. In several Charts which were not then compared with this one by the Compiler, the positions of the following places are thus assigned. Menam lat: 13° 30N. & long: 101° 15E. Cape Liant 12° 27N. & long: about 101° 40. Cape Patani lat: 7° 4N. about long: 101° 50. But the Coasts of the Gulf of Siam have never been accurately surveyed [hence ?] a general Sketch only is here attempted.

The vagueness of this ancestral reference cannot be condoned; even allowing for the possible desire of Lieutenant Low to testify to the mongrelism of his map in a courteous manner. Mr. Macalister probably was dismayed by the ambiguousness of what was presumably an explanation of the derivation of the “principal outlines” of the map; possibly also, he wondered at the marriage of a cartographic sexagenarian — d’Anville’s map of the area — and several rather more youthful geographical constructs.

Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d’Anville (1697-1782) was the paragon of the classical map maker : a scholar whose talent lay in the critical assessment and painstaking correlation of all manner of topographical sources both ancient and recent, and the presentation of his conclusions as cartographic masterpieces. Although d’Anville did not set foot outside Paris, he acquired an international reputation as the most skilled map maker of his time and a massive amount of source material was brought to him for consideration. He was among the first to ferret out details about the countries of the East from the works of Oriental writers; and such was his research that only exploration and actual survey would yield more accurate and complete charts. Among the cartographic materials brought

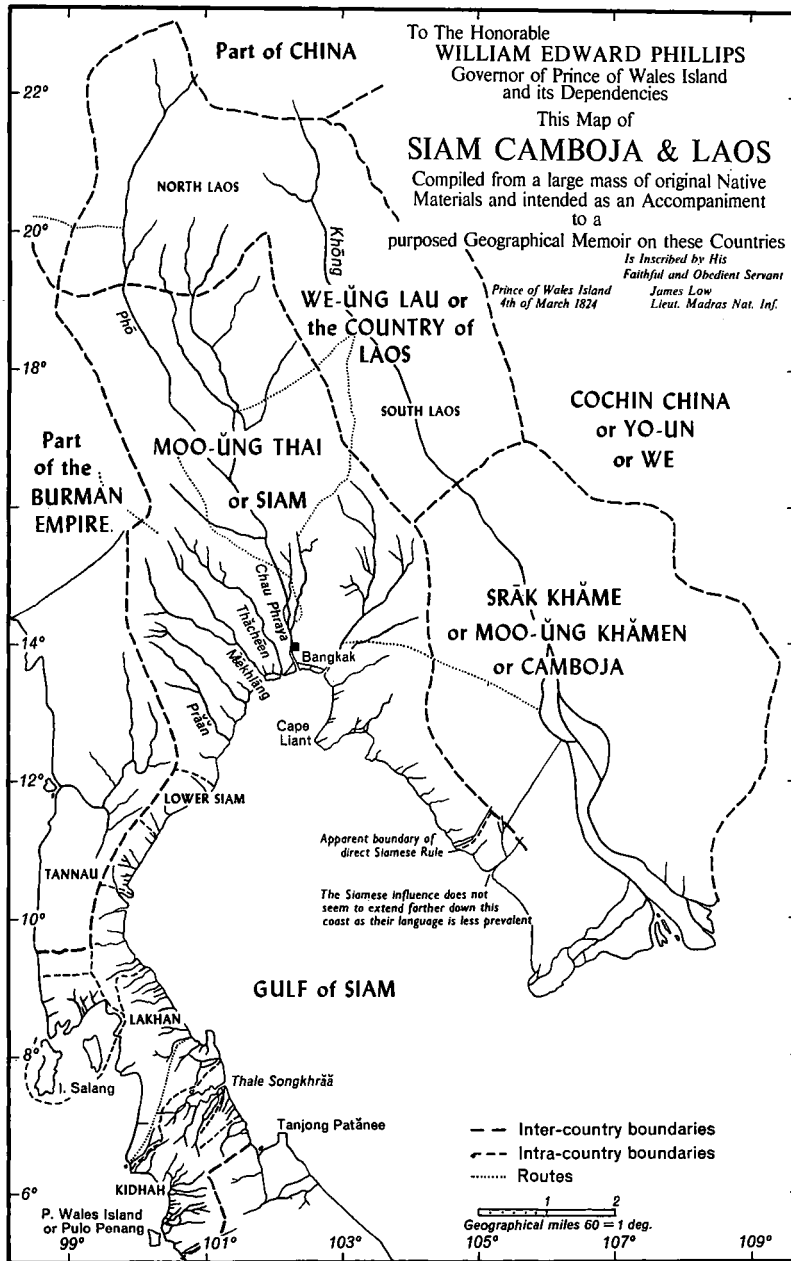


Figure 1. After Lieutenant James Low's map 'Siam Camboja & Laos', 1824: Topographical and Political Features.

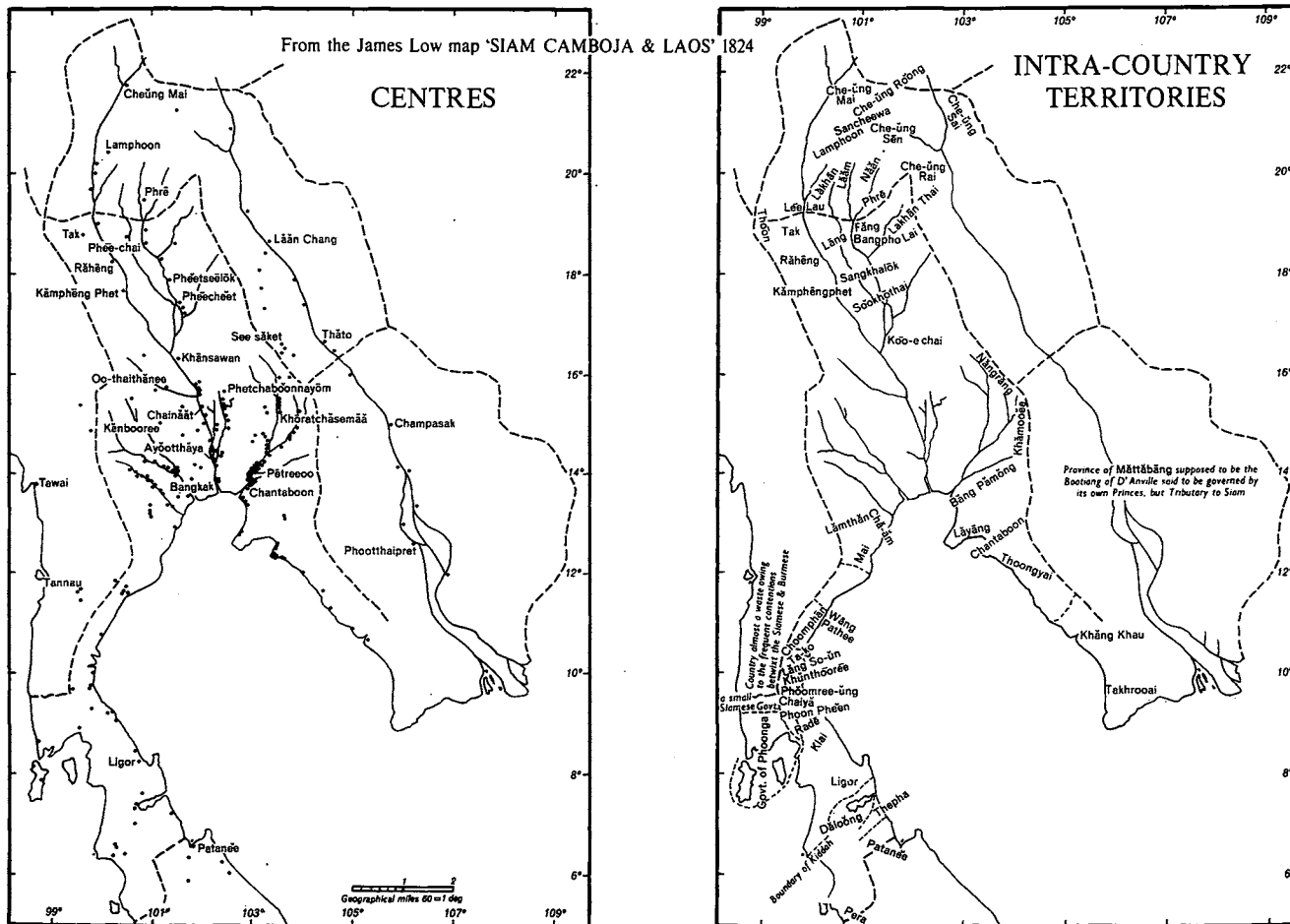


Figure 2.

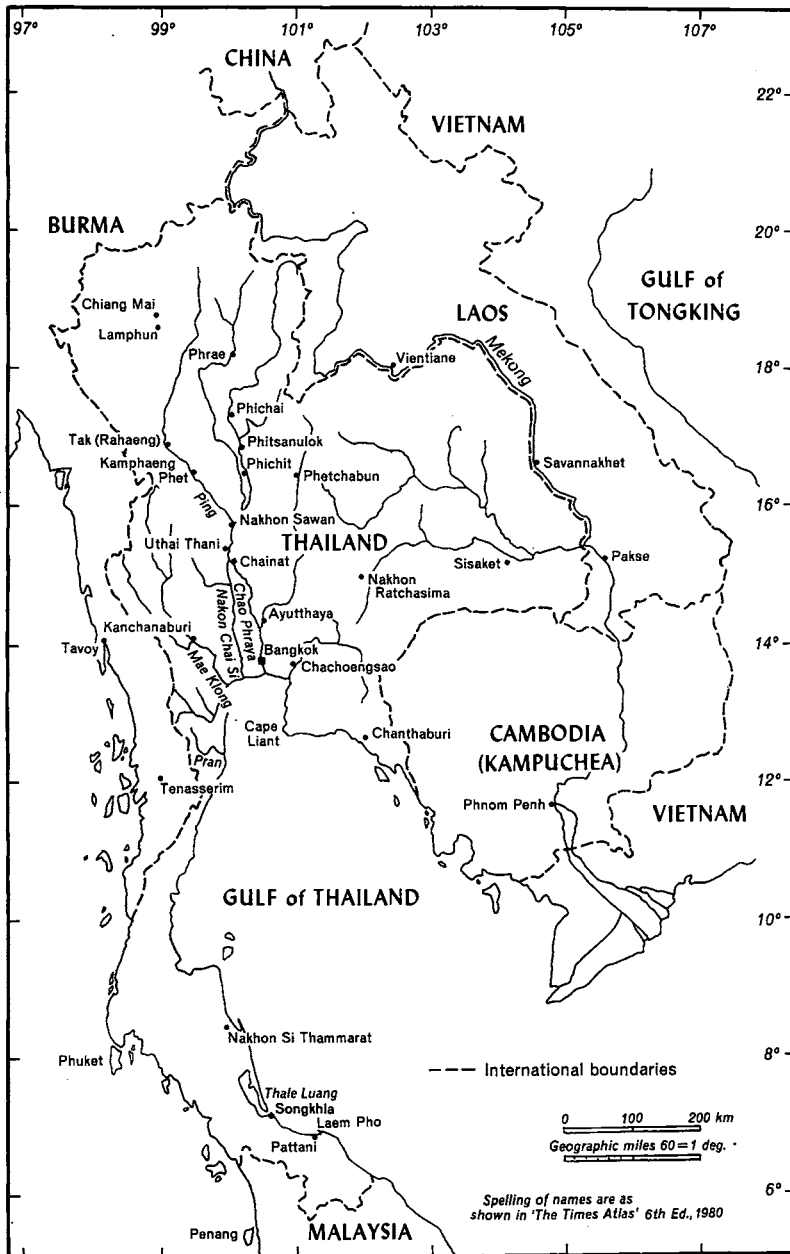


Figure 3. Thailand at present.

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to d’Anville were the surveys of the provinces of China with which members of the Society of Jesus had busied themselves since the seventeenth century. D’Anville turned this information into forty-six maps which afforded Western Europe the first reasonable conception of the geography of the Celestial Empire. These were published in 1737 under the title “Nouvel Atlas de la Chine, de la Tartarie Chinoise”. D’Anville’s notable map of the whole of the continent of Asia appeared in 1751; this was updated and a large map of Asia (in three parts) was produced in 1761-1763. In 1780, shortly before his death, d’Anville gathered his latest maps together in an “Atlas general”; presumably, this last atlas (there were previous ones) is Lieutenant Low’s “D’Anvilles Atlas” from which “Siam Camboja & Laos” derived its “outline” in large part.⁸ In this, lieutenant Low was not so much wise as without alternative, for the extensive exploration and actual survey of the area which would alter d’Anville’s chart dramatically was yet to get underway in earnest.

One vital alteration in d’Anville’s map of the area had been made without “extensive exploration and actual survey”, however, and Lieutenant Low adopted this change, again not so much wisely as necessarily. The accurate determination of latitude and longitude (particularly longitude) made real advances during d’Anville’s lifetime and soon after his death in 1782 the whole of the Southeast Asian area had been repositioned through several degrees of longitude.⁹ Although the latitude/longitude grid was not yet precise when Lieutenant Low set out his map, it was accurate enough for his purpose. Relatively little difference shows up, for example, between present positions and those reported by Lieutenant Low in the map’s pedigree: at present the position of the mouth of the Chao Phraya river (presumably Lieutenant Low’s “Menam”) approximates 13°30’N, 100°40’E; that of Cape Liant is 12°33’N, 100°55’N, 100°55’E; and Laem Pho (Lieutenant Low’s “Cape Patani”) is at 6°59’N, 101°16’E.¹⁰

So, the seemingly incongruous wedding of the cartographically old and the geometrically new in Lieutenant Low’s “Siam Camboja & Laos”, was in truth,

8. One among the several excellent histories of cartography which give due notice to the work of d’Anville is Bagrow, L., *History of Cartography* (revised and enlarged by R.A. Skelton) C.A. Watts & Co. Ltd., London, 1964, particularly pages 185-186.

9. The history of the determination of longitude, and latitude, is entertainingly told by L.A. Brown in his *Map Making, the Art that became a Science*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston & Toronto, 1960, particularly pages 119-165.

10. Latitudes and longitudes are from *The Times Index-Gazetteer of the World*, The Times Publishing Co. Ltd., London, 1965.

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a fitting accommodation in the circumstances peculiar to this area during the first half of the nineteenth century. Still a question remains as to whether any significant cartographic change had been made to d'Anville's map of the area by later European geographers which was known to Mr. Macalister and had not been incorporated in "Siam Camboja & Laos". Although it cannot be presumed Mr. Macalister had perfect knowledge of the work of these geographers, it can be assumed he had access to the information available to Lieutenant Low. Lieutenant Low, however, gave no particular indication of these sources either in his map's pedigree (in which he alludes only to a dependence on the work of "more recent Geographers"; that is, later than d'Anville) or in the letter to the Secretary to Government of Prince of Wales Island which accompanied it (a failing, indeed) but he does proffer this information, albeit in a cryptographic fashion, in his "Geographical Memoir" which was "nearly arranged" when the map was submitted :

This Map has been chiefly compiled from Siamese, Burmese, Peguan and Malayan Authorities. But while collecting and arranging their Statements and Plans, advantage has been taken of all the information connected with the subject contained in those Geographical Works to which my situation afforded access (a).

Note (a). D. Anvillie's Maps of India extra Gang : Pinkerton's Geography. Aitken's Geographical Delineations. Tucky's Marit : Geog : Hamilton's Gazette. Encyclop : Brit : La Loubere on Siam Khempfer's Japan. Leyden (in A. S. Transac.) Milburn.

("A Description of the Map of the Siamese Empire", Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Secret and Political Consultations, 18 December 1826, pages 218-341.)

Decoding these "references" proved a tedious task; however, the cipher was cracked : for "D.Anvillie's Maps of India extra Gang :" read d'Anville, J.B.B., *Atlas general* 1780 and/or previous atlases compiled as early as the mid-18th century; for "Pinkerton's Geography" read Pinkerton, J., *Modern Geography* 2 vols., London 1802 and/or 1 vol. abridged edition, London 1803 and/or 3vols., London 1807; for "Aitken's Geographical Delineations" read Aikin, J., *Geographical Delineations* 2 vols., London 1806; for "Tucky's Marit : Geog : " read Tuckey, J.H., *Maritime Geography and Statistics* 4 vols., London 1815; for "Hamilton's Gazette" read Hamilton, W., *The East India Gazetteer* London 1815; for "Encyclop : Brit : " read *Encyclopaedia Britannica* possibly the 5th edition published

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in 1817 and/or previous editions; for “La Loubere on Siam” read La Loubere, S. de, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam* London 1693 ; for “Khemper’s Japan” read Kaempfer, E., *History of Japan* 2 vols., Glasgow 1727; for “Leyden (in A.S. Transac.)” read Leyden, J., “On the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations,” *Asiatic Researches* vol 10, 1811, pp. 158-289; and for “Milburn” read Milburn, W., *Oriental Commerce* 2 vols., London 1813.

Of these references, one carries information which might have influenced Mr. Macalister’s opinion about Lieutenant Low’s map. This information is provided on two maps included in Pinkerton’s *Modern Geography* : one of these maps is in the two volume work published in 1802 and again in the three volume edition published in 1807; the other map is in the one volume edition published in 1803. Strangely, the one volume edition, though advertised as an abridged version of the two volume work published a year before, includes a map which differs from the one which accompanies the earlier unabridged version in that it shows many more topographical features; indeed, the chart in the “complete” two volume *Modern Geography* proffers little more than an outline of the South-east Asian mainland (and archipelagos) and would amply justify Lieutenant Low’s truth-claim “that existing Maps of the World exhibit the Countries alluded to nearly as a blank”.¹¹ Yet, even this simple map shows a major topographical feature in a markedly different way from its depiction on Lieutenant Low’s “Siam Camboja & Laos”.

“Thale Songkhraa or Salt Lake” appears on “Siam Camboja & Laos” as a finger-like bay of the Gulf of Siam poked deeply into the eastern side of peninsular Siam about 120 geographical miles north-northeast of Prince of Wales Island or Penang; see Figure 1. “Thale Songkhraa [Songkhla]” does not actually mean “Salt Lake”, though its water is somewhat brackish, but merely Lake Songkhla; Songkhla being the name of the town at its entrance. At present, this body of water is called Thale Luang which means Big Lake; see Figure 3. The obvious difference between the depiction of this significant topographical feature on Lieutenant Low’s chart and a modern map is in its orientation : perpendicular to the coast on the former and parallel to the coast on the latter. The significance of this difference is that it is symptomatic of the origin of the Lake : on Lieutenant Low’s map it seems a ria or drowned valley; on a modern map it seems a lagoon. Thale Luang is, in fact, a lagoon formed by a tombolo

11. Letter from Lieutenant James Low, *op.cit.*, page 438.

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complex. On most maps dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries (in fact, on hydrographic charts from the mid-19th century) the Lake is correctly oriented and separated from the Gulf by a large, spitted island, usually named Tantalam. On d'Anville's more recent maps of the area the Lake tends to an orientation perpendicular to the coast and the island Tantalam is separated from the coast by a lengthy narrow waterway all along its western edge. It is probable Lieutenant Low "improved" this improbable physical feature by making of the narrow waterway a river and doing away with Tantalam island altogether. This remaking of the coastline, though logical, was incorrect and if Mr. Macalister suspected this he might have been led to harbour suspicions about other features of Lieutenant Low's map.

Another major topographic feature of Lieutenant Low's map which is depicted differently on the map "East Indies" which accompanies the abridged version of Pinkerton's *Modern Geography* is the catchment of the Chao Phraya river. Headwaters of the "Chau Phraya" on "Siam Camboja & Laos" reach well northward of twenty-two degrees of latitude in tributaries of the "Pho" (the Ping); somewhat further north than headwaters of the "Khong" (the Mekong) in fact, see Figure 1. On "East Indies" as on modern maps (see Figure 3) the headwaters of the Chao Phraya reach little beyond twenty degrees of latitude and the Mekong reaches well beyond thirty degrees of latitude. Since the extent of the reaches of the Chao Phraya vis-à-vis the Mekong river systems is correctly displayed on d'Anville's maps of the area, the presentation by Lieutenant Low may be another "improvement" which was not only incorrect but may have aroused the suspicion of Mr. Macalister for being inconsistent with the authoritative geography of the time.

Yet another major topographical feature incorrectly depicted on Lieutenant Low's map might have excited Mr. Macalister's disapprobation: the course of the Mekong river. On "Siam Camboja & Laos" the Mekong proceeds in a direct way from its head south-southeast to its deltaic embouchure (see Figure 1); the "elbows" in the river at about eighteen degrees of latitude which bring it well east of its line on "Siam Camboja & Laos" are not shown, see Figure 3. So, almost the whole of what is now northeast Thailand (fully a third of the entire area of the modern kingdom) has no place on Lieutenant Low's map. No other European map of the time differs from "Siam Camboja & Laos" in this respect; indeed, the first accurate map of the river was made in the late 1860s by the Mekong-phile Francis Garnier.¹² Is it possible that among Lieutenant Low's

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“large mass of original.....authentic Native Plans, & Itineraries, and oral information” there was nothing which pointed to the true course of the Mekong and the existence of the extensive tract of land which lay within its wide eastward flexure? Well, it is possible, of course, but improbable. In fact, at least one indigenous map existed which specifically detailed the northeastern portion of the kingdom, and which clearly showed the great bow in the Mekong river.¹³

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12. See Garnier, F., *Voyage d'Exploration en Indo-Chine effectue pendant les annees 1866, 1867 et 1868...*, Librairie Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1873, 2 volumes; or a later edition in one volume published in 1885. Francis Garnier's fascination with the Mekong river is made evident by Hugh Clifford in his readable *Further India*, Alston Rivers Ltd., London, 1905, particularly pages 128-306. Henri Mouhot would have discovered the great bend in the Mekong river a decade before Garnier had he been permitted by the authorities to pursue his “intention...to proceed northwards, only stopping in the province of Louang Prabang, and then to descend the river as far as Cambodia”; Mouhot, H., *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, during the years 1858, 1859, and 1860*, John Murray, London, 1864, volume 2, page 277. Garnier thought it possible the first European to follow the course of the Mekong from Vientiane to “Oudong” (near Phnom Penh) was a Dutchman, Gerard van Wusthof, in the 1640s, though likely he traversed the country well west of the great bend in the river; see Garnier, F., “Voyage Lointain aux Royaumes de Cambodge et Laouwen parles Neerlandais et ce qui s'y est passe jusqu'en 1644” *Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie*, Series 6, Number 2, 1871, pages 249-289 and map. Garnier, in fact, met a Dutchman named Duysart, actually on the Mekong a short way above Chiang Khan which is upstream from Vientiane. Duysart, a surveyor in the employ of the Siamese, appears to have crossed the country from Chiang Mai to the Mekong, striking it well above Luang Prabang, and then rafted downstream, thereby becoming the first European to descend and to survey that portion of the river. Although more than this is not known of Duysart's work, “the record of whose journey and surveys seems to have been engulfed in the files of one of the Government Departments at Bangkok” (Clifford, H., *op.cit.*, pages 201-202), it is possible he also rounded the great bend in the Mekong.
13. In 1960 I was given a copy, albeit in poor condition, of what was evidently a beautifully drawn indigenous Thai “map”, the title of which translates roughly as “Strategic Map from the Reign of King Ramathibodi I”. “King Ramathibodi I” refers to the first king of the Bangkok Dynasty who reigned from 1782 to 1809. “In April of 1966 I was privileged to gain access to the Museum of the Royal Thai Survey Department for the purpose of making an inventory of the unique collection of maps therein — undoubtedly the most extensive and varied in Thailand” (Sternstein, L., “A Catalogue of Maps of Thailand in the Museum of the Royal Thai Survey Department, Bangkok” *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Volume LVI, Part 1, January 1968, page 47). There, I re-discovered several copies of the “Strategic Map from the Reign of King Ramathibodi I”; the catalogue entry reads: “...no date but c. 19th century based on original from c. late 18th century; no scale but c. 1:700,000; no direction; elevation by pictograms; shows military installations through pictograms, routes, settlements in central, northern & northeastern Thailand; 2 sheets mounted as 1, 90x115 cms...in Thai. N.B. This map will be discussed in a forthcoming paper” (Sternstein, L. *op.cit.*, page 63). This map was discussed (indeed, it was dissected) in a later paper, but not by me as had been intended, for my catalogue entry had excited another, V. Kennedy, to publish “An Indigenous Early Nineteenth Century Map of Central and Northeast Thailand” *In Memoriam Anuman Rajadon*, The Siam Society, 1970, pages 315-348 plus eleven plates. The “map” clearly shows all of what is now the Northeast of Thailand nestled in the great eastward bow of the Mekong river.

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Whether Lieutenant Low disbelieved or did not have this information is a moot point; what is to the point is that Mr. Macalister, who appears to have enjoyed the confidence of the "Native populations [which] had....a stronger attachment to him than has ever possibly been experienced by any other Person in a similar Situation"¹⁴, might have had this information and believed it merited mention if not outright credence.

It need not be supposed Mr. Macalister was certain of the incorrect depiction of several major topographical features on "Siam Camboja & Laos" because he need only have been uncertain to have had serious misgivings about "the merits of Lieutenant Low's Map". (Similarly serious misgivings about the true geography of mainland Southeast Asia may have led the author of *Modern Geography*, Mr. Pinkerton, to include only an outline map of the area in his "greatly enlarged" three volume edition published in 1807 - a map identical, in fact, to that which accompanied the two volume, first edition of *Modern Geography* published in 1802 - despite that a single volume abridged version of the first edition which had appeared four years before, in 1803, included a map which purported to show the main topographical features of the area included in "Siam Camboja & Laos".) Perhaps Mr. Macalister's expressed inability to concur with the laudatory sentiments of the Governor of Prince of Wales Island regarding Lieutenant Low's map stemmed from a concern to counsel caution against hearsay and to urge actual survey against analytic surmise though this required uncommon patience. Such a concern could come from a general philosophical stance vis-à-vis intelligence, as would befit a magistrate; such a concern also could come from the knowledge that certain pertinent information had been gathered and would soon be in the hands of the relevant authorities, if not freely available. If, as I believe, there is in the tone of Mr. Macalister's demur more than a hint of distaste for the person of Lieutenant Low, this distaste would seem to stem from Lieutenant Low's behaviour with respect to the presentation of "Siam Camboja & Laos". The suggestion is that Lieutenant Low not only proffered his map prematurely but that he did so purposefully in order that it not be superseded before a reward could be claimed. What evidence is there for this conjecture?

In 1821 a merchant was sent to Bangkok by the Governor of Prince of Wales Island; ostensibly in a private capacity, but actually to gather information about the kingdom and to sound out the Siamese about the possibility of removing

14. Obituary of John Macalister Esq., *op.cit.*

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restrictions on the activities of British subjects in Siam.¹⁵ Although nothing is now known of the intelligence imparted to the Governor of Prince of Wales Island by his personal emissary, the Governor’s reaction to Lieutenant Low’s map strongly suggests he had learned nothing which reduced its worth. In 1821, also, the Government of India sent John Crawford to Bangkok with instructions to negotiate with the Siamese over the question of British trade and to gather as much information as he could about the kingdom. Lieutenant James Low, though fluent in the Thai language - uniquely so for a European - did not accompany this mission. The reports of John Crawford, who returned to India at the end of 1822, are replete with intelligence and must have been of the greatest value; still, nothing contained therein invalidates Lieutenant Low’s map.¹⁶ There is, however, an intriguing bit of information contained in a letter, dated 29th December 1822, from John Crawford to the Secretary to the Government at Fort William in which was described the work of the “Geographical and Surveying Departments” :

....Ever since the month of February last, Mr. Brown has applied himself with great assiduity to the Surveying Department and the following is an outline of the results vizt.¹⁷

Five Charts upon a large scale of the Eastern Coast and head of the Gulf of Siam; a chart of the river of Siam on a large scale from actual survey; an outline chart of the Gulf of Siam; a chart of the group of islands called Si-chang in the Gulf of Siam from an actual survey; a delineation of a portion of the Anambas Islands in the China Seas, and a chart of a portion of the North-West Coast of Borneo, being in all ten charts. To these are added a descriptive Memoir.

The whole of the coasts and countries delineated in those charts have either never been described or delineated before, or

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15. See Hall, D.G.E., *A History of South-East Asia*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1960, page 399.
16. See *The Crawford Papers*, Vajiranana National Library, Bangkok, 1915 and “Bengal Political Consultations” 15 January 1823, paragraphs 16-45.
17. In the Vajiranana National Library publication of *The Crawford Papers, op.cit.*, this paragraph is replaced by four asterisks which indicate an editorial deletion. Unfortunately, this omission permits the inference that the charts described subsequently were submitted with the letter; an inference which is not supported by the full text.

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much less accurately so than by Mr. Brown.

.....

In relation to the Surveying department, it is almost unnecessary for me to submit that the cautions recommended in the instruction of the Government on this subject have been strictly attended to. At Siam, the express permission of the Government was obtained for using our surveying and astronomical instruments....

(Bengal Political Consultations, 15 January 1823, paragraph 31 seq.) Orders were passed on all of John Crawford's letters¹⁸ among these he was instructed

....to transmit to the Office of the Secretary in the General Department, the Charts and other Documents connected with the Survey prepared by Mr. Brown, and the Honorable the Governor General in Council will be prepared on a report from the Marine Surveyor General of the extent and value of Mr. Brown's services to make him a suitable remuneration.

(Bengal Political Consultations, 15 January 1823, paragraph 45.)

Although the recommendation of the Marine Surveyor General is not known and though the charts described in John Crawford's letter were not among the many maps sent to London for publication,¹⁹ the assertion by Lieutenant Low that "the Coasts of the Gulf of Siam have never been accurately surveyed" (which assured statement appears on the map "Siam Camboja & Laos") was incorrect, at least in part; and if lieutenant Low was aware of the surveys made or even contemplated by Mr. Brown, then this testimony was, in truth, a deception. Since it may be supposed that the surveys contemplated, if not accomplished, during the mission to Siam were known to the government of Prince of Wales Island, it may be supposed, also, that Mr. Macalister believed Lieutenant Low's presentation of the map "Siam Camboja & Laos" (respectfully dedicated to the Governor) not simply a premature act but a maneuver.

Such a supposition is supported by the admission of Lieutenant Low himself that the map "Siam Camboja & Laos" was "intended as an Accompanie-

18. See "Bengal Political Consultations" 15 January 1823, *op.cit.*

19. Letter from the India Office Library and Records, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, dated 10 October 1980 in reply to my enquiry dated 1 October 1980.

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ment to a purposed Geographical Memoir on these Countries"; a "Geographical Memoir....nearly arranged" which was not brought forward because

....it seems highly desirable that it should be collated with the scattered Notices, which I learn, have been offered by Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Indo Chinese Countries visited by them. As these works which, it has been stated to me, contain these notices, are not in our Library and are indeed very rare in India, some delay becomes unavoidable. Besides, it is my intention to elucidate the Memoir by many individual Plans and Drawings of which I have not yet got duplicates made.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Public Consultations, 15 April 1824, pages 440-441.)

This memoir, titled "A Description of the Map of the Siamese Empire" was presented to the Secretary to the Government of Prince of Wales Island only in December 1826,²⁰ by which date James Low had been promoted Captain in the 46th Madras Native Infantry.

The two and a half years between the receipt by the Council at Prince of Wales Island of the map "Siam Camboja & Laos" in April 1824 and the geographical memoir which it was to accompany in December 1826 was a busy time for James Low; a period during which he was engaged on several important political missions associated with the First Anglo-Burmese War and the push southward of the Siamese in the peninsula. This was a busy time also and for the same reason for Captain Henry Burney, military secretary to the Governor of Prince of Wales Island from 1818 to 1824. Between James Low and Henry Burney there was a rivalry manifested in open enmity. When the Supreme Government in India decided to make a second approach to the Siamese Court (the first being that of John Crawfurd in 1821) the envoy chosen was Captain Burney. Lieutenant Low, though available and eminently qualified for such a mission, was passed over. The omission of Lieutenant Low might be explained by his having become identified with the anti-Siamese faction at Prince of Wales Island; more likely an explanation is that Captain Burney had presented himself to the Governor-General in Calcutta immediately prior to the decision to reapproach the Siamese Court and, in all probability, had argued persuasively for such a

20. See "Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Secret and Political Consultations" 18 December 1826, pages 218-341.

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mission on behalf of its strongest advocate, the Governor of Prince of Wales Island. Captain Burney arrived at Bangkok at the end of 1825 and remained there for six months during which time the Siamese signed a commercial agreement and treaty under which their constraints on British merchants were loosened somewhat in exchange for concessions with respect to claims in Kedah, Perak, Kelantan and Trengganu. These concessions dismayed the authorities at Prince of Wales Island who sought to redress the situation by despatching an expedition under Captain Low (promoted from Lieutenant in May 1826) to Perak in September 1826 for the purpose of checkmating the Siamese. This he did too well, for he grossly exceeded his instructions by signing a treaty with the Sultan of Perak which promised British assistance against threats to his independence from all comers, and particularly the Siamese to whom the Sultan had formerly sent tribute. Since the Council at Prince of Wales Island lacked the authority to confirm this treaty, it was referred to the Governor-General of India. The Governor-General not only did not ratify the treaty, he condemned it. Before this reproof reached Prince of Wales Island, Captain Low had been sent on another punitive expedition; this time to root out "pirates" who regularly raided the harbour at Prince of Wales Island and apparently were assisting the Siamese to undermine the authority of the Sultan of Perak. Again, Captain Low was too successful: the chief "pirate" was captured but being Siamese he had to be tried at Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) where the Raja maintained the "pirate" was one of his own officials charged with the administration of Siamese territory. Captain Burney strongly supported the Raja of Ligor in a report to the Supreme Government in Calcutta. This led the Governor-General of India to censure the Governor of Prince of Wales Island and to suspend Captain Low from all political duties.

...Our only national object of policy hereafter in relation to the Siamese should be to endeavour to allay their jealousy of our ultimate views....and to derive from our connexion with them every attainable degree of commercial advantage, by practising in our intercourse with them the utmost forbearance, temper, and moderation both in language and action, by striving to cultivate a friendly understanding with the Court and its provincial Governors in our neighbourhood, and above all, by faithfully and scrupulously observing the conditions of the treaty [Burney's treaty] which fixes our future relations....

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(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island, Governor-General to Governor in Council, 23 July 1827, page 142.)

The Governor of Prince of Wales Island prepared a nice defence (which turned on the position of a boundary line on a map prepared by Captain Burney himself) which satisfied the Supreme Government which subsequently reinstated Captain Low in November 1827.²¹

Against the events of the period between April 1824 and December 1826 (even as sketchily presented here) the brief letter from Captain Low to the Secretary to Government of Prince of Wales Island under which he submitted his “Geographical Memoir” becomes pregnant with meaning :

I have the honor to forward a Paper descriptive of the Map of Siam formerly presented by me to the Government, and at the same time to express my regret that two several [severe?] disappointments in the reasonable expectations I had been led to entertain of being enabled to penetrate to the Capital of that Country from Trang and Tavay [Tavoy] respectively have prevented me from making any additions to the Paper.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island, Secret and Political Consultations, 18 December 1826, pages 218-219.)

So, “A Description of the Map of the Siamese Empire” is nothing more than the “Geographical Memoir...nearly arranged” two and a half years before, and comprises none of the promised “Notices...offered by Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Indo Chinese Countries visited by them” or “individual Plans and Drawings”. Indeed, it is signed “James Low (Lieutt. 46th Regt. M.N.I)” and dated “1st August 1824”.

“The Description of the Map of the Siamese Empire” is a sloppy document comprising bits of information both factual and fanciful presented in an indifferent, if not negligent, fashion. It begins with a brief - equally an apologia as an explanation - about the sources of intelligence on which depend both the map “Siam Camboja & Laos” and the memoir. Then an attempt is made to delimit “The Boundaries of Siam”; a delimitation rather too vague even allowing

21. This historical episode is described somewhat differently by different historians; see, for example, Hall, *op.cit.*, pages 446-450; Jackson, J., “Introduction” (an account of the life of James Low) to an Oxford in Asia Reprint of Low, L., *The British Settlement of Penang*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pages viii-x; and Tarling, N., *Imperial Britain in South-East Asia*, Oxford University Press, 1975, pages 56-57.

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for the vagarious notions of informants. Next is a try at tracing the true course of "The Me Nam Yai, or Me Nam Thai, or Menam Chau Phreea vizt. The great river of Siam"; a trace too indistinct even allowing for the many discrepancies in those descriptions available to its author. After this is a list of 485 transliterated place names together with bits of information about each (or, at least, most) ;, commonly these notices comprise a phrase which proffers a translation - occasionally entertaining - of the place name; sometimes the notation is somewhat elaborate, though not necessarily informative. For example, place name 66 is "BANKAK" (Bangkok) of which we learn: "The Capital. The river may be her 1/4 mile wide". (Actually, the river is approximately a quarter-kilometer wide at Bangkok.) The 485 place names are organized along stretches of rivers and coasts, though within this scheme are notices of several routes and the places through which they pass, and certain administrative units. The last section of the memoir is devoted to "Lanchang or We Ung Chan" (Vientiane) and mainly to the traditional tale of the derivation of the name in lieu of the history of the place which the author admits he had "not...any means of investigating."

The Council of Prince of Wales Island duly ordered "that a Copy of the Memoir be prepared for transmission to the Honorable the Court of Directors.²² Thereinafter, the Council spoke twice but tersely :

On the receipt of your Honble Courts letter [in which approval was given for a "donation" of 2000 Dollars to Lieutenant Low for the map "Siam Camboja & Laos" and for acquiring a working knowledge of the Thai language] Lieut Low was called upon to submit at his convenience, the promised Memoir on Siam, which he stated he was preparing to accompany his Map. For the memoir alluded to we beg to refer to our proceedings in the Secret and Political Department.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island, Public Consultations, 25 January 1827, paragraph 16.)

...we have to honor to transmit [a] Copy of a Geographical Memoir on Siam by Captain Low as an accompaniment to his map. This promised Memoir, in the transmission of which some

22. "Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Island Secret and Political Consultations" 18 December 1826, page 341.

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delay has taken place, was taken into consideration in granting Captain Low the donation of 2,000 Dollars, which your Honorable Court has been pleased to sanction.

(Straits Settlements Factory Records, Prince of Wales Islands, Secret and Political Consultations, 28 January 1827, paragraph 6.)

If Captain Low was chastened by Council’s implied criticism and his coincident appointment to the “quiet” position of Superintendent of Province Wellesley, the mainland appendage of Prince of Wales Island, his subsequent activities provide no evidence of this. Damning criticism continued to be heaped on him for the manner in which he conducted both his public and his private affairs, yet he continued — indeed, intensified — an assiduous pursuit of knowledge about Thailand and the Malay Peninsula.²³

One of the better known of the learned works of James Low is “A grammar of the Thai or Siamese language” which he had published in Calcutta in 1828. In fact, he took leave from official duties to actually shepherd the grammar through the printery.²⁴ Captain Low’s sojourn in Calcutta led also to his publishing another document, though this one is virtually unknown; at least reference to it in the literature has not yet come to my notice: “A Map of Siam, North Laos, Martaban, Tennasserim and Part of the Malayan Peninsula Compiled by Capt. James Low of the Madras Army” materialized in 1830, Figure 4. This map is an up-dated version of “Siam Camboja & Laos”, as is attested to in its pedigree:

The following materials have been used in the construction of this Map. Horseburgh’s Chart for certain known points on the Coasts. A Map of Siam by Capt. Low, compiled in 1822. The Tract of the Vessel which conveyed Mr Crawford’s Mission from Siam to Cochinchina. Running surveys made by Capt. Low of Martaban & Tavay [Tavoy] — of Phoonga [Phangnga] — Junkceylon [Phuket], Trang — Keddah & Perak — Numerous Burman and Siamese original Charts & Itineraries collected during the last ten years by him.

“A Map of Siam...” is of a size nearly that of “Siam Camboja & Laos”

23. See Jackson, J., *op.cit.*, pages x-xxiv.

24. See “Straits Settlements Factory Recrds, Prince of Wales Island Secret and Political Consultations” 20 November 1827, page 75.

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and has been redrawn to reflect this correspondence as well as to facilitate a comparison between the lineaments of the two charts; Figures 1 & 4. The area charted on "A Map of Siam..." is more accurately represented than on its predecessor, though the improvement is not consistent over the face of the map and in places the adjustment is slight. A first and fundamental change for the better is the rectification of the longitudinal grid through approximately two degrees so that meridians cross the area shown on "A Map of Siam..." in much the same way as on a modern map. Other significant amendments to "Siam Camboja & Laos" are made on "A Map of Siam..." in the littoral and near-littoral areas of the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of Siam and the South China Sea; areas which were either personally surveyed by Captain Low in the "Ceded Territory" (see Figure 4) and southward along the western side of the peninsula, or along the tract of the vessel which carried the Crawford Mission to and from the Siamese Court at Bangkok. That Captain Low when in Calcutta in 1828 saw the charts produced under the auspices of the Crawford Mission is certain;²⁵ almost as certainly, these charts coupled with his own "running surveys" induced Captain Low to compile "A map of Siam..." and, thereby, to tacitly admit to at least certain of the shortcomings of his initial map. Whether Captain Low sought absolution from the hostile verdict (albeit unpronounced) of the surveyors and relief from a measure of scholarly self-reproach by superseding "Siam Camboja & Laos" and by publishing "A Map of Siam..." at his own expense and without petitioning the Supreme Government for remuneration, is a moot point. Taken at face value, "A Map of Siam..." represents an attempt to order the best information available at the time; a simple ensemble of intelligence of which, perhaps, not more was wanted than it be a credible pointer to the truth. Still, fault might be found with Captain Low for his not highlighting the uneven reliability of the information for different parts of the area described; though one cannot but be aware of this discrepancy in that "A Map of Siam..." differs markedly from "Siam Camboja & Laos" where actual surveys had been made and the two maps are much the same where actual surveys had not been made.

"A Map of Siam..." holds approximately 400 place names and other notices; and approximately 500 numbers, Figure 5. The numbers do not correspond to those in the geographical memoir — "A Description of the Map of the Siamese Empire' —

25. Although these charts appear not to have been forwarded to London (see footnote 19) at least two are now lodged in the National Archives of India (letter from the Archivist, National Archives of India dated 15 September 1983 in reply to my enquiry dated 23 August 1983). A rummage in this archive will likely provide several "finds" on Siam.

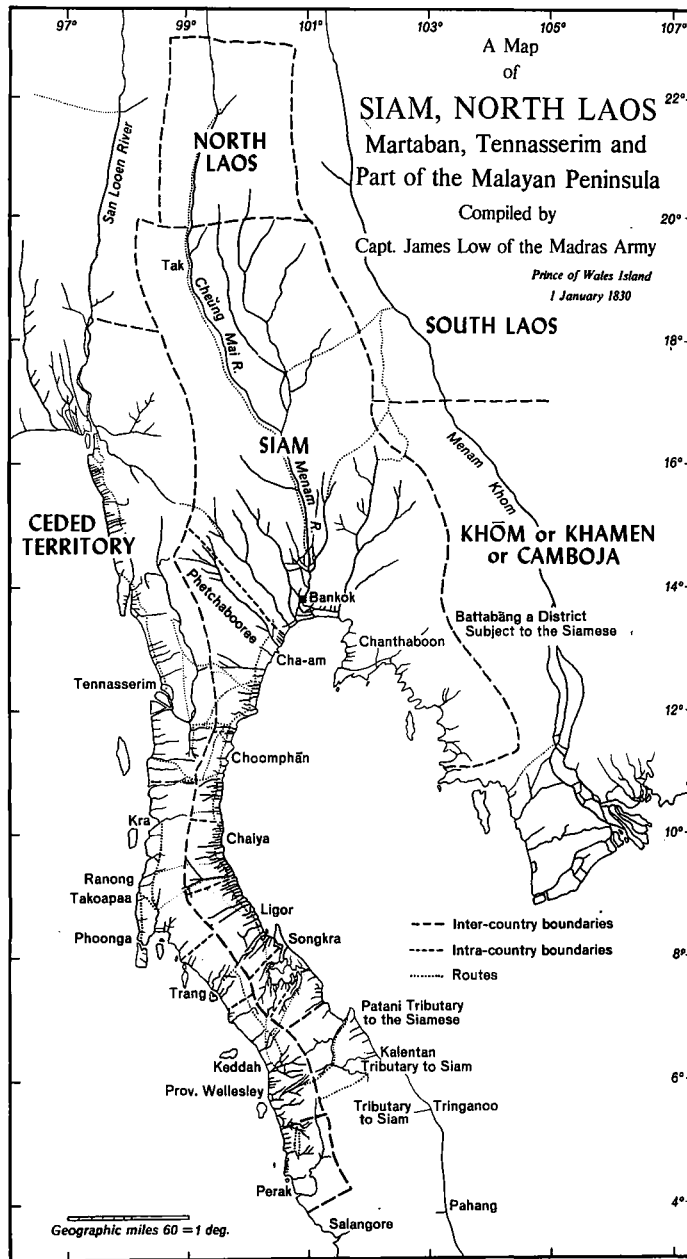


Figure 4. After Captain James Low's 'A Map of Siam...', 1830: Topographical and Political Features.

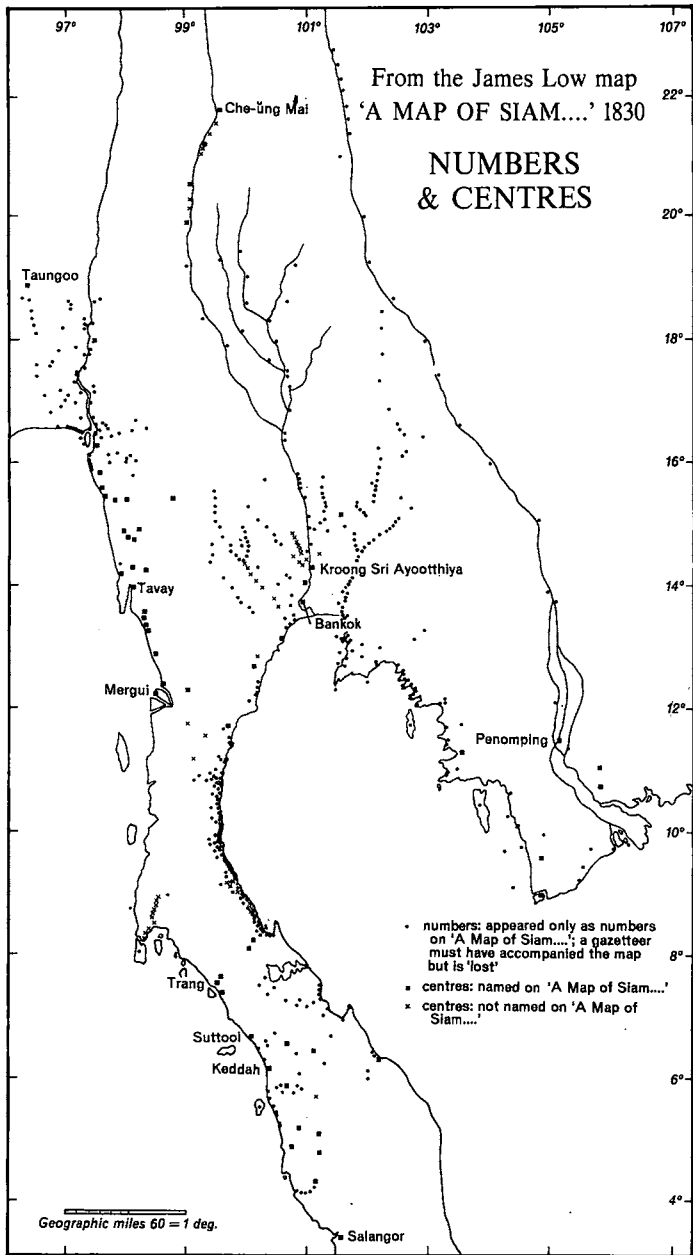


Figure 5. From the James Low map 'A Map of Siam...', 1830: Numbers and Centres.

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which the map “Siam Camboja & Laos” was to accompany, though many may be reconcilable with entries therein. Since there is no reference on “A Map of Siam...” to the gazetteer which accompanied it but is now “lost”, a reader might be excused a deal of perplexity and even a touch of frustration. The names and notices on “A Map of Siam...” fall mainly into three categories: approximately sixty percent concern landforms, waterbodies, mineral deposits and vegetation; another twenty percent comprise names of settlements; and approximately fifteen percent refer to political divisions; the remaining five percent is made up of a variety of notices but mostly about tribal populations in the rugged terrain between Siam and the “Ceded Territory”, and economic activities. That “A Map of Siam...” includes a considerably greater number of notices about resources (approximately a quarter of all names and notices) and a nicer delimitation of political entities than does “Siam Camboja & Laos” must reflect, and quite naturally, the heightened concern of the Supreme Government about its relationships with its neighbours following the acquisition of the “Ceded Territory” in Burma which aroused the already awakened apprehensions of the Siamese. If Captain Low was concerned to provide his masters with an intelligence report, “A Map of Siam...” certainly contained the desired kind of information, though some of it was seriously flawed.

Perhaps the most fateful piece of misinformation conveyed by “A Map of Siam...” is the extent of the Siamese kingdom, the most significant indigenous power in the area with which the Supreme Government had to contend. Siam, in fact, comprised a much larger area than the sliver of land depicted; indeed, prior to the sending of a commissioner to the Principality of Chiang Mai (vaguely represented by “North Laos” on Captain Low’s map) in 1874, approximately half the territory of the kingdom proper was in what is now Northeast Thailand which has no place on “A Map of Siam...” because of the erroneous depiction of the course of the Mekong river, which feature is seemingly affirmed by being reproduced from “Siam Camboja & Laos”. Might not the Supreme Government in India have dealt differently with the Siamese Court had it been apprised of the true extent of the Siamese kingdom? Might not the subsequent arrangements between the British and the French with respect to the maintenance of Siam as a “buffer” between their claims on the mainland of Southeast Asia been different had the true extent of the kingdom been apprehended from the outset of their adventures?²⁶

26. The territorial machinations of the Pavie mission certainly suggest the two powers would have reached quite a different compromise; see Pavie, A., *Mission Pavie, Indo-Chine, 1879-1895*, Leroux, Paris, 1903, particularly “Notices et Cartes”.

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The first accurate map of the Mekong River, and thereby of Siam, did not materialize until the late 1860s, near enough a half century later than “A Map of Siam...” In the interim, a number of surveys were made which brought charts of the area closer to the truth. “A Map of Siam...”, despite its shortcomings, might have found approval as the first “scientific” attempt at a portrayal of at least the littoral and near-littoral portions of the area but for the fact it appeared two years after the remarkably accurate delineation of the Gulf of Siam on the “Map of the Kingdoms of Siam and Còchin China” which was compiled by John Walker to accompany John Crawfurd’s “Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China” published in London in 1828;²⁷ compare Figures 3, 4 and 6. Doubtless, Captain Low had not seen John Walker’s fine map before he painstakingly prepared “A Map of Siam...”, but I doubt Mr Macalister, had he lived, would have found in this circumstance reason to alter his opinion.

It seems to me the Low maps of Siam reflect an opportuneness rather than an opportunism and, as such, merit commendation, though they be little more than curiosities.

27. John Crawfurd, author of *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London, 1828) in which the “Map of the Kingdoms of Siam and Cochin China” appears (54 × 82 centimeters, facing page 1 of the *Journal...*) thought its compiler and engraver, Mr John Walker, had “on the present occasion skilfully availed himself of the scanty materials which were placed in his hands” (Crawfurd, J., *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Oxford University Press, 1967, page 597).

From our vantage of hindsight, Crawfurd’s praise seems faint; for despite its failings, Walker’s map must be adjudged a master-work.

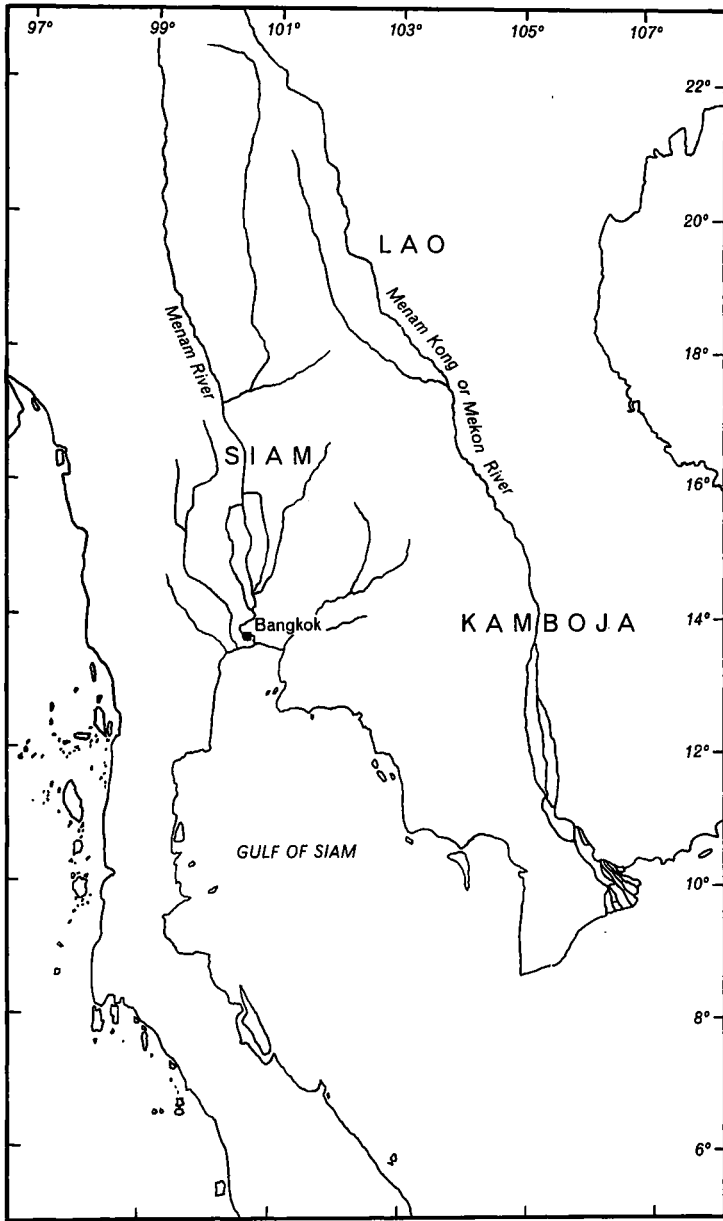


Figure 6. From the 'Map of the Kingdoms of Siam and Cochin China' compiled by John Walker to accompany John Crawford's *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* 1821-22.

