PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF AYUTTHAYA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract
The Portuguese were commercially most active and most successful in Ayutthaya in the first half of the sixteenth century and the Spanish, from their base in the Philippines, were most active as missionaries in Siam and Cambodia in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. There is much to be learnt about the government, economy, society and culture of Ayutthaya in the Portuguese and Spanish official chronicles, commercial reports and missionary accounts, not least because of the relative paucity of local sources for this crucial period. Some of the more important of these documents are discussed, and an attempt is made to re-assess their reliability and their shortcomings as historical sources[1].

The Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya was one of the first countries with which the Portuguese established commercial relations after their conquest of Melaka in 1511, and they retained a significant and continuous presence there until the invasion and sack of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767 (for a recent account see Flores 1991). The Spanish for their part made several abortive attempts from the Philippines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to establish permanent missions in Siam and Cambodia. However, Siam was never of paramount commercial or missionary importance either to the Spanish or to the Portuguese, and there was consequently less need for a regular supply of information about the kingdom in Lisbon and Madrid, or even in Manila, Goa and Macau, than there was for news of events in, for example, the Moluccas or Japan. No doubt for this reason, there are relatively few detailed accounts of Siam in either Spanish or Portuguese, even for the period when the merchants and missionaries of the two Iberian countries were most active in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, a study of such contemporary accounts as do exist, in spite of their obvious limitations, the prejudices, intolerance and ignorance they display, the unreliability of their sources of information, the inaccuracy of their statistics and their tendency to distort, exaggerate and even invent, and the difficulty of providing corroboration for them from the rare indigenous sources, can often reward the historian with much useful information and many valuable insights.

The principal sixteenth century sources are of three kinds. First, there are the official or semi-official Portuguese chronicles, the primary function of which was to record the history of the great achievements of the Portuguese in Asia. Of these, the works of João de Barros, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, Gaspar Correia and António Bocarro contain a significant amount of information about Siam. The equivalent Spanish chronicles, such as the monumental *Historia general y natural de las Indias* by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes published in Seville in 1535 and the *Historia general de las Indias* of Francisco Lopes de Gomara published in Zaragoza in 1552,

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either have nothing at all to say about Siàm or only give it a passing mention. Then there are the commercial reports, of which the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa's *Livro*, both written before 1520, are unquestionably the most important. Thirdly, there are the missionary reports, correspondence and histories, chiefly Jesuit, Dominican and Franciscan and all belonging to the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. There are not many of these missionary accounts, partly because Siam, like the other Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, proved to be a rather unfruitful field for Christian missionary endeavour, although it was never entirely abandoned. Few missionaries even succeeded in penetrating into the country, and those who did, although they seem almost invariably to have been hospitably received and well treated by the Siamese, and allowed to preach and to proselytize freely, frequently met their deaths in one of the frequent wars with its neighbours in which Ayutthaya was involved during this turbulent period. Several Portuguese accounts, including the *Peregrinação* of Fernão Mendes Pinto and the *Décadas* of Diogo do Couto and António Bocarro, describe these wars in some detail, with a wealth of greatly inflated statistics concerning the size of the opposing armies and frequent references to the presence on both sides of Portuguese mercenary soldiers. The accounts given by the missionaries of these wars invariably, of course, record the deaths of their brethren as glorious martyrdoms.

The *Peregrinação* of Fernão Mendes Pinto, which is the only sixteenth century secular travel book about Asia in either Portuguese or Spanish that contains information about Siam, is one notorious example of a European source that needs to be treated with great caution (but see Smithies 1997). Even the same author's famous letter to the Jesuits in Portugal sent from Melaka on 5 December 1554, in which he describes in great detail the splendours of the royal palace of Ayutthaya, an outing by King Chakkraphat on the Chao Phraya River in the royal barge and the ceremonial bathing of a royal white elephant, is of dubious veracity and, in any case, contains little solid information that the historian can make use of, being concerned almost exclusively with the more superficial and glamorous aspects of life in sixteenth century Ayutthaya (Rego 1947–58: V: 369–72).

All the early Portuguese and Spanish sources agree that Siam was one of the three greatest kingdoms in the eastern half of Asia, equalled or excelled in wealth, power and extent only by China and Vijayanagar. Of these sources, the four *Décadas da Ásia* of João de Barros, which were published between 1552 and 1615, are arguably the most reliable, as well as having the most literary merit. Barros had no first-hand experience of Asia, but he was an erudite and painstaking scholar. He collected a vast amount of material from a wide variety of informants and contemporary written sources, and he was at least no more liable than any of the other Portuguese chroniclers of the time to suppress or distort the truth in order to demonstrate the splendour of Portuguese imperial achievements. He declares that, 'in the parts of Asia that we have discovered, there are three heathen princes with whom we have dealings and friendship, whom we call emperors of all the heathen east and who inhabit the mainland'. The rulers of Orissa, Bengal and the rest, 'although they are lords of great states and are powerful in land, population, trade and wealth, cannot be compared with these three. They have beneath them princes who are their vassals that in Europe would rule great kingdoms and principalities'. The greater part of the population of these three states were heathen, and 'the land of the east [China] is the mother and the most civilized of them' (Barros 1563: II: 36–7).

According to the Thai chronicles, by the late fifteenth century the rulers of Ayutthaya could claim to exercise various degrees of suzerainty over sixteen principalities or cities *(müang)*. These included Tenasserim, Tavoy, Martaban and Moulmein in Lower Burma, Chantaburi, Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Phichit, Kamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla in central and southern Thailand, and Melaka in the Malay Peninsula (Charnvit 1976: 93–100). However, by the time the Portuguese first sailed into Southeast Asian waters in the early sixteenth century, in those cities that were flourishing seaports and were furthest from the centre of royal power in Ayutthaya, Siamese suzerainty had already become largely nominal, amounting to little

more than payments of tribute. This seems to have been chiefly due to the rise of Muslim economic and political power and influence both in the ports and at the court of Ayutthaya itself. The rulers of Melaka, indeed, who, according to Tomé Pires and other Portuguese sources, had been converted to Islam by foreign Muslim merchants who came there to trade, had completely thrown off Siamese suzerainty twenty years before the Portuguese arrived.

Nevertheless, these same Portuguese sources all agree that the authority of the King of Siam extended in some measure over many of the peoples and territories between the eastern coasts of the Bay of Bengal in the west and the Vietnamese coast in the east. Tomé Pires, whose *Suma Oriental,* written between 1512 and 1515, is the earliest exhaustive account of Asian commerce in any European language, lists Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Martaban and several other ports which cannot be certainly identified as 'belonging to lords of the land of Siam, and some of these are kings'. He states that,

> . . . they all have junks; these do not belong to the King of Siam, but to the merchants and the lords of the places; and after these ports there is the river of Odia [Ayutthaya], where they go up the river to the city—a river where boats and ships can go, wide and beautiful' (Cortesão 1944: I: 103; 105–6; 241–2; 253).

Duarte Barbosa, who was in the service of the Portuguese crown in India from about 1500 to 1516 or 1517 and whose *Livro em que da relação do que viu e ouviu no Oriente* was completed in about 1518, lists Tenasserim (Mergui), Kedah, Pattani and Selangor as parts of the 'great kingdom which they call that of Anseam, belonging to the heathen'. He says that 'the king is a very great lord and holds the coast as far as the other which turns towards China beyond Melaka, so that he has seaports on both sides. He is commander of many footsoldiers and cavalry and of many elephants.' (Barbosa 1946: 199; Dames 1918–21: II: 162–9). The accounts of Pires and Barbosa suggest that in the early sixteenth century these port states, while enjoying a considerable measure of commercial and even political autonomy, were nevertheless still integral parts of the Siamese realm.

João de Barros derived most of his information on Siam from a Portuguese adventurer of good family called Domingos de Seixas, who had been taken captive with some of his compatriots by the King of Siam and had been in royal service in Ayutthaya for 25 years, first as a slave and then as a soldier, rising eventually to the rank of *capitão da gente* (Barros 1563: II: 38). Although his geography is sometimes confused, Barros confirms in the second book of the third *Década* that the Siamese realm with its vassal states stretched from the Bay of Bengal in the west to the South China Sea in the east and so 'has a share of both seas' (*participa de dois mares*) (1563: II: 37). He says that on the west side, that is in modern Burma, there were seven states called Rey, Tagala, Tavam, Pulot, Meguim, Tenassarij and Cholom. Of these only three—Tavoy, Tenasserim and Mergui—can be identified with certainty. Barros asserts that their rulers, 'although they have the title of king, are subject to the Siamese state', and only certain Muslims who have made themselves masters of the seaboard', that is to say Melaka and the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, do not obey its laws. A little later he says that there were nine Siamese kingdoms, only two of which were inhabited by Thais. The first of these was Ayutthaya, which he calls Hudia, Odia or Muantay, the capital of the whole Siamese kingdom. He translates Muantay as *reyno de baixo*, the 'kingdom below' or 'southern kingdom', but it is more likely that Muantay is simply a rendering of *müang thai.* He says that within Ayutthaya there were six vassal states, each of which had a governor called Oya (in modern Thai, *phraya*, the second rank of conferred nobility). Three of these are places in modern Thailand—Pangoçay (Bang Pla Soi, which is no longer of any importance), Lugo (Nakhon Si Thammarat) and Patane (Pattani), and three are in modern Malaysia—Calantam (Kelantan), Talingano or Talinganor (Terengganu) and Pãm (Pahang). Barros calls the other Thai kingdom Chaumua. This is probably his rendering of Chao Nua or northern people, which may account for his translation of Muantay as southern kingdom. He states that

the people of Chaumua speak another language. The most important Thai kingdom to the north of Ayutthaya in the sixteenth century was Lan Na, the principal capital of which was Chiang Mai, but the identification of Chaumua with Lan Na-Chiang Mai is not certain, as Barros confusingly goes on to say that Chiamay (Chiang Mai) was the principal city of Jangama, one of three Lao kingdoms under Siamese suzerainty, the other two being Chancray (Chiang Rai) and Lanchãa (Lan Xang). The four other vassal kingdoms making up the total of nine are Camboja (Cambodia), Bremá (Burma, i.e. Toungoo), Como and Chaidoco, all of which Barros says had their own language. Neither of the last two of these has been identified. Bremá was divided into Bremá Ouá, Bremá Tangut, Bremá Pram, Bremá Beca and Bremá Lima. Barros says that all seven of the non-Thai kingdoms were inhabited by 'foreigners conquered by the Siamese; fear and necessity alone make them subject to the King of Siam and they are constantly in revolt. They and the people in all the neighbouring territories are idolaters' (1563: II: 38–9). Among these neighbours of the Siamese, Barros mentions the Lao people, who lived to the north and east of Siam on the banks of the Mekong, as being almost constantly in a state of rebellion and having only refrained from attempting to throw off Siamese suzerainty altogether because Ayutthaya provided them with protection against some mysterious people called the Gueos, who hunted on horseback, tattooed themselves and were 'so wild and cruel that they eat human flesh'. He identifies the Gueos with the inhabitants of the kingdom that Marco Polo calls Cangigu, and says that from time to time they would descend from the mountains to the plains of Laos, where they would make 'great devastation' (1563: II: 37–8). The Gueos are described by Camões in canto X of *Os Lusíadas*:

> See in the remote mountains other people
> Who call themselves Guéus in the empty wilderness,
> They eat human flesh, but their own
> They paint with hot iron, a cruel custom !

In book IX of the first *Década*, Barros gives the names of the seven kingdoms subject to Siam as Camboja, Como, Lanchã, Chencray, Chencran, Chiamay, Camburij and Chaipumo (1552: IX: 110). The last two of these names do not occur in the passage in the third *Década* discussed above, while two others, Chencray and Chencran, both appear to be versions of Chiang Rai, which in the third *Década* Barros renders as Chancry. These inconsistencies in Barros' rendering of Thai, Lao and Burmese place names, in addition to suggesting that he gained his information from more than one source, demonstrate well the need for caution in using the *Décadas* as a source for the political history, let alone the geography, of sixteenth century Siam.

Tomé Pires, like Barros, says that the Muslims in the seaports enjoyed a great measure of independence and were 'obedient to their own lords' (Cortesão 1944: I: 13; 104–5). He adds, however, that there were very few of them and that they were not liked by the Siamese. Barbosa says that at Tenasserim there were 'many merchants both Muslim and Hindu, who deal in goods of all kinds and possess many ships which sail to Bengal, Melaka and many other places', while at Kedah 'there are many great ships', and 'it is a place of very great trade to which every year Muslim ships come from many places', but he also notes that the King of Ayutthaya did not allow Muslims to bear arms (Barbosa 1946: 199–200). It is clear that, as the Muslims in these ports became richer and more powerful, so their recognition of the suzerainty of Ayutthaya became increasingly nominal. On 14 October 1551 Gaspar Lopes wrote from China to his brother António Lopes de Bobadilla telling him not to be 'deceived into thinking that Pattani is subject to the King of Siam. We now have, God be praised, only Siam and Japan as friends, and we can come and go and conduct trade if we pay the tolls on arrival.' (Schurhammer 1982: 311) By this time, if Fernão Mendes Pinto is to be believed, the Muslims in Siam were much more numerous. In his letter of 15 December 1554, he maintains that in the city of Ayutthaya alone there were already seven mosques, where Turkish and Arab imams officiated, and 30,000 Muslim households, and that 'it should be a cause for great shame to the soldiers of Christ that the perverted sect of Mohammed is so widespread in these parts'

(Rego 1947–58: V: 372). He adds significantly that, since the King of Siam considered himself to be master only of his subjects' bodies and not of their souls, he left them free to practise any religion they chose.

Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, who, in spite of living in Asia for ten years from 1528 to 1538, seems to have been rather less sure of his geography than Barros, confirms in his *História do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, first published between 1551 and 1561, that the King of Siam was 'a very great lord both in territory and people', whose realm stretched from the Bay of Bengal to the coasts of Indochina and who 'possessed many and good ports' on both these coasts, all of them 'great cities in which very much rich merchandise' was traded. The capital city of Ayutthaya lay 'thirty leagues up a river so wide and deep that laden junks can sail there', and it was 'a very great and populous city with rich and beautiful buildings and very much trade, being supplied with a great abundance of goods' (Castanheda 1924–33: II: 156–9).

Nearly a century later, Fray Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio in his *Breve y verdadera relacion de los sucesos del Reyno de Camboxa*, published in 1604, also describes the city of Ayutthaya as very beautiful, with a magnificent royal palace, numerous temples and monasteries and many houses of brick and lime. He notes that it was entirely surrounded by water and contained a hundred lagoons, in one of which ships as large as 500 tons could shelter in a storm. He mentions the presence of many Portuguese, both missionaries and merchants at the court and in the port of Ayutthaya, some of whom were on friendly terms with King Naresuan (San Antonio 1604: II: 36v).

The *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires is one of the few sixteenth-century Portuguese sources to show a clear understanding of the system of government and administration in the Siamese kingdom, and of how power was devolved outwards from its centre in the royal capital of Ayutthaya through the *khunnang* or royal officials to the periphery (Dhiravat 1990: 127–40). Pires states that the kingdom was justly ruled, although the king's authority was absolute, and 'the important men are very obedient to the king'. Immediately under the king were two viceroys or governors, who were both 'very rich and important' and like the king in their own territories. One ruled from Kamphaeng Phet over the lands 'on the Pegu and Cambodia side', in other words in the north, and the other in the south on the Tenasserim, Trang and Kedah side, in the area between Pahang and Ayutthaya itself. Many of the ports in these two regions also had 'lords like kings', some of whom were Muslims (Cortesão: 1944: I: 103–10).

Barros also describes the King of Siam ruling from Ayutthaya as an absolute monarch to whom all Siamese were in complete subjection, 'because all live by him'. This, he correctly says, was because all land in Siam belonged to the crown, like the *reguengos* or crown lands of Portugal, and because the king only gave estates or cities to his vassals as a reward for their services to hold for a fixed number of years or for their life time. In return, they were obliged to provide the king with a certain number of mounted men, footsoldiers and elephants. The men who worked on the land paid a proportion of the produce to the king or to the lord to whom the king had granted it (Barros 1563: II: 40–40v).

Since the chief interests of the Portuguese in Siam, and indeed in Southeast Asia generally, were commercial, it is scarcely surprising that the Portuguese sources, including the reports and correspondence of the Jesuits and other missionaries written from the field during this period, often provide more useful information about the economic situation in Southeast Asia and the trading possibilities that existed there for the Portuguese than they do about political and social conditions, and are concerned as much with the commercial realities as with the nature of Southeast Asian governments and administration or with the customs and religious beliefs of the people. We have already noticed that most of the Portuguese sources give detailed descriptions of the ports of Siam, of the traders who frequented them and the goods that passed through them. The information provided in these descriptions suggests that by the early sixteenth century much of Siam's overseas trade in the Indian Ocean was conducted not from the city of Ayutthaya itself, for all the advantages of its position on the Chao Phraya River and its status as the royal capital, but from ports in the tributary

states on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, while Siamese trade in the Indonesian archipelago and the South China Sea was carried on from ports in the Malay Peninsula. Duarte Barbosa says that Mergui, for example, at the mouth of the Tenasserim River, was frequented by merchants of many nations, especially Muslims, who brought copper, quicksilver, vermilion, cloth dyed in grain, Cambay cotton cloth, silk, printed Mecca velvets, saffron, opium, threaded white coral, and rosewater transported from Mecca and Aden in little copper barrels and sold by weight, with the barrel included. All this merchandise was then imported into Siam in exchange for Siamese goods. Barbosa also notes that the tributary state of Kedah on the west coast of the peninsula produced pepper, which was shipped to Melaka and China, while Pahang on the east coast was an important source of gold, but was no longer a vassal of Ayutthaya, having transferred its allegiance to Melaka (Barbosa 1946: 200).

Melaka, from where, according to Tomé Pires, a wide variety of goods was still being imported into Siam in the early sixteenth century, ranging from spices, opium, vermilion, sandalwood and camphor to Indian textiles and slaves, was a prime example of a state which had acted while it was under the suzerainty of Ayutthaya as an entrepôt for Siam's international trade, but which the Siamese merchants had ceased to frequent as soon as it threw off that suzerainty. Among the goods exported from Siam to Melaka, Pires lists rice, salt, dried fish, arrack and vegetables, which had formerly been taken there in as many as thirty junks a year, as well as lacquer, benzoin, sappanwood (brazilwood), lead, tin, copper, silver, gold, ivory, cassia fistula and large quantities of 'cheap, coarse Siamese cloth for the poor people' (Cortesão 1944: I: 107–8). The *Roteiro de Vasco da Gama*, written shortly before the Portuguese arrived in Southeast Asia, singles out benzoin for mention as the principal Siamese product exported to Melaka at that time (Costa 1969: 88). Barbosa says that some of the best benzoin came from the country round Tenasserim (Barbosa 1946: 199).

António Bocarro, writing about events in the year 1613 in his *Década 13 da História da Índia,* makes it clear that a hundred years after Pires Mergui still played an important role in Siamese trade, and that much of this trade was still conducted by Muslim merchants. He describes the arrival in Ayutthaya of an embassy from Bijapur, bringing three horses caparisoned with silk, but without saddles, and two sheep from Hormuz. The purpose of the embassy was to promote trade links between Tenasserim and Dabul by supplying the King of Siam with any goods that he might require, especially arms and Cambay and Balagate cloths, which were often 'fine and of great value' and to conclude an agreement for the establishment of a trading post in Mergui for the Muslim merchants from Bijapur (Bocarro 1876: I: 531–2).

It is evident from these Portuguese and Spanish sources that the Muslim merchants from India, Persia and elsewhere who had settled in Ayutthaya, Mergui and other ports continued to exercise considerable power and influence in both the commercial and the political life of the Siamese kingdom throughout the sixteenth century, and that, in consequence, Ayutthaya maintained close relations with many Muslim states. A no less important role in Siamese commerce was played by the Chinese. Tomé Pires emphasizes the privileged position enjoyed by the Chinese in Siam in comparison with merchants of other nations. Siam, he writes, 'is very large and very plenteous, with many peoples and cities, with many lands and many foreign merchants, and most of these foreigners are Chinese, because Siam does a great deal of trade with China'. According to Pires, the Chinese paid lower dues than the Muslim Arabs, Persians, Bengalis, Kelings from the Coromandel Coast and other foreign merchants who frequented Siamese ports (two in every twelve as against two in every nine), and he notes that the Chinese goods that came through Siamese ports were traded as far away as Hormuz (Cortesão 1944: 1: 104–5).

It is clear from the correspondence of Afonso de Albuquerque with Lisbon and from the *Comentários* of his son that he was well aware, even before he captured Melaka, of the wealth and commercial power of Ayutthaya and of the important part played by the Chinese in that commerce. He knew that Melaka had already thrown off Siamese suzerainty and was hostile to Ayutthaya, so that Siamese traders no longer

frequented the city and instead were increasingly concentrating their activities on the ports of the Bay of Bengal and the Malay Peninsula. He also realized that the best way of opening commercial relations with the Siamese in these circumstances would be to enlist the support of the Chinese merchants trading between Melaka and Ayutthaya. In October 1511, therefore, before he had even completed the conquest of Melaka, he had already asked a group of Chinese merchants who were sailing to Ayutthaya in two junks to take Duarte Fernandes with them to try to establish trade relations with the Siamese (Albuquerque 1774: III: 128–9).

Duarte Fernandes was an officer in the Portuguese fleet who had come to Melaka in 1509 and spent two years in prison with Rui de Araújo. According to the *Comentários* and to the *Lendas da Índia* of Gaspar Correia, he was well qualified and well suited for the task of negotiating with the Thais. One of his qualifications seems to have been that he had learned 'the language' during his imprisonment (Correia 1975: II: 262; Albuquerque 1774: III: 129, 172–5). If, as seems most likely, 'the language' was Malay, this suggests that Malay was the commercial lingua franca at Ayutthaya at that time, as it was in many parts of Southeast Asia. Correia, Castanheda and Barros all tell in detail the story of Fernandes' mission to the court of Ayutthaya and the subsequent embassies of António de Miranda de Azevedo and Duarte Coelho, which ended with the conclusion of the Luso-Siamese treaty of 1518, and all give descriptions of the elaborate ceremonies and lists of the lavish gifts exchanged between the king and the ambassadors. After Azevedo's embassy, one member of his retinue, Manuel Fragoso stayed behind at Ayutthaya for two years in order to prepare a report 'on the products, the dress and customs of the Siamese, and the depth of the harbours'. This report, which Fragoso, in the company of ambassadors from the kings of Siam and Pegu, took to Goa in 1513 to submit to Albuquerque, is now lost, but it is probable that both Barros and Barbosa saw it and made use of it in writing their descriptions of Siam (Campos 1982: 12–13; Albuquerque 1774: IV: 103–4).

By the end of the century, the Portuguese were trading with Siam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia out of Macau as well as Melaka and thereby helping to maintain Siam's commercial links with China. The Spanish Franciscan, Fr Marcelo de Ribadaneira, in *his Historia de las Islas del Archipielago y Reynos dela Gran China, Tartaria, Cuchinchina, Malaca, Sian, Camboxa y Iappon*, published in Barcelona in 1601, states that Siam at that time was

> . . . abundant in all merchandise, for many ships of the Chinese and Portuguese from Macau and Melaka and the Muslims of Pattani and Brunei and other parts carry it there. From that kingdom they take cotton thread, brazilwood, much silver and lead, benzoin and deer skins . . . They also kill many tigers, ounces, rhinoceroses and other animals, and sell the hides to merchants . . . because there are so many merchants, there is a great abundance of ivory with which the merchants load their ships. There are few important people in Siam who do not have very large ships which they send to China and other kingdoms to trade'(Ribadaneira 1601: I: 171).

The Portuguese Dominican, Fr Gaspar da Cruz in his *Tractado em que se cõtam muito por estẽso as cousas da China*, published in 1569, paints a rather less rosy picture of the part played in his time by Chinese merchants and Chinese goods in Siamese trade. He asserts that already by then the only goods exported from China were silks and porcelain, and that these were carried in Portuguese and Siamese ships. The quantities must have been relatively small, since he says that only five or six of these ships sailed from Chinese ports each year, a figure that accords with Pires, who fifty years earlier had recorded that Siamese trade in China consisted of only six or seven junks a year (Cruz 1953: 112). Gaspar da Cruz also observes that, in order to circumvent the trade prohibition imposed by the Ming emperors, it was a common practice for Chinese merchants in Ayutthaya, like those in Pattani, Melaka and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, to return clandestinely to China in their own vessels laden with merchandise, taking with them a Portuguese, whom they would bribe to take their goods through the Chinese customs and pay any duties on their behalf (1953:112). Portuguese also often sailed

with the Siamese embassies and tribute missions that went to China every two years or so. There are, for example, many references in the Jesuit correspondence to St Francis Xavier's plan, which he never put into effect, to enter China by sailing first from Melaka to a Siamese port in a Portuguese vessel and then from Ayutthaya to China with one of these tribute missions.[2]

Bocarro also has much of interest to say about Siamese commercial relations with the Europeans at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He points out that, Siam being so near the Philippines, it was always to the advantage of the Siamese to remain on friendly terms with any Spaniards who came to their country, although Antonio de Morga in his *Sucesos de las Islas Philipinas*, first printed in Mexico in 1609, says that the ships sailing to Manila from Siam and Cambodia were few and infrequent. Morga notes that they would arrive in April, May and June, bringing with them benzoin, pepper, ivory, cotton cloths, rubies and sapphires 'badly cut and set', a few slaves, rhinoceros horn, hide, hoofs and teeth, and 'other trinkets', which they would exchange for such goods as were available in Manila, chiefly also, it seems, mere trinkets (Bocarro 1876: 531; Stanley 1868: 343).

Bocarro describes the two factories maintained by the Dutch and the English, the former 'with great resources' and the latter with less. Both Dutch and English traded with Siam in deer hides, rayfish skins, sappanwood, silk from China and Cochinchina, and pepper, which they brought from Bintang by way of Pattani. They also sent ships to Japan with Siamese goods, thereby making great profits for themselves and for the King of Siam, 'which is why he is so attached to them' (1876: 530).

In comparison with these detailed discussions of commercial matters, there is disappointingly little accurate information, even in the missionary records, to be gleaned from the Portuguese and Spanish sources about the religious beliefs and practices of the Thais. Some contain highly-coloured descriptions of the splendid pagodas[3] and the rich treasures they contained, the elaborate cremation ceremonies and the austere lives led by the Buddhist monkhood, but none reveals more than a very imperfect understanding of the doctrines of either Hinduism or Buddhism. Even by the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese seem to have advanced little further in their understanding of the religions of the *gentios* (heathens) whom they encountered in Asia than Vasco da Gama and his companions who, when they first arrived in India, thought that the Samorin, the Hindu ruler of Calicut, was a Christian.

It is only to be expected that Barros (1563: II: 39–40), for example, would show a limited understanding of Buddhist doctrine and practices, and it is a characteristic misrepresentation by Fernão Mendes Pinto to assert to his fellow Jesuits that the Thais worshipped the four elements, so that the bodies of those who believed in the divinity of water were buried in the bed of a river when they died, those who believed in fire were cremated, those who believed in earth were buried in the ground, and those who believed in air were left floating in a river or exposed in the open to be devoured by the birds (Rego 1947–58: V: 371–2). But it is somewhat surprising that Spanish and Portuguese missionaries writing fifty years later should give almost equally inaccurate and confused accounts of the religion of the people they were trying to convert to Christianity. The Portuguese Dominican friar, Fr. João dos Santos wrote one of the most extended of these accounts of Buddhism in sixteenth-century Siam in his *Ethiopia Oriental*, published in 1609. Its chief interest lies in its description of the mission of two of his brethren, Fr. Jerónimo da Cruz and Fr. Sebastião do Canto to Ayutthaya in 1566, which reveals much about missionary methods in Southeast Asia at that time. Since the Thais had already been told by the Portuguese living in Ayutthaya that the two friars, who appear to have been the first Christian missionaries to enter Siam officially, were 'dedicated to the worship of the true God', they received them with great honour and hospitality and provided them with houses in which to say Mass. The two friars apparently soon learnt Thai so thoroughly that they were able to speak it as though it were their mother tongue and so could begin to preach. Many of 'the heathen nobility', some of the leading women, even 'priests of the idols' and monks, 'who lead a solitary existence in those parts and live from alms and are great penitents, mortifying their passions and forcing

them to obey reason', came to listen to their preaching and were apparently impressed by it. The Muslims, however, were not content to hear the Dominicans teaching doctrines that were so at variance with the tenets of their 'depraved sect', so they tried first to foment a riot by insulting the Portuguese merchants with whom the friars lodged, and, when that failed to have any effect, they resorted to bribing the Buddhists with money, so as to win their support for 'the sacrilege they were planning to perpetrate'. In this they were more successful. When the riot began, the two Dominicans, hearing the great outcry, came out of their houses and tried to separate the Muslims from the Christians. In the ensuing mêlée, Fr. Jerónimo was killed by a lance thrust. Most of the Buddhists were horrified at this and 'made the city resound with their cries and groans. The grandees and nobles of the land covered their heads with ashes and the common people rent their garments'. At Fr. Jerónimo's funeral, many people kissed his hands and feet with great devotion. The king was then ten days' journey away (perhaps at Lop Buri) and, when he heard the news, he was very angry and ordered that all the malefactors, whether Muslim or Buddhist, be arrested, the Muslims put to death by being trampled by elephants and the guiltiest Buddhists beheaded, while those who were less guilty were to be exiled from the kingdom in perpetuity. Fr. Sebastião do Canto was wounded, but recovered and went to the king to beg him to spare the lives of those he had condemned. The king was amazed at the friar's petition, but graciously agreed to remit the sentences, saying that the Portuguese must be very good people if they could so readily forgive those who had wronged them (Santos 1609: II: 113–5).

This incident reveals that at this time, as later, friendly relations were maintained between the Buddhist ruler of Ayutthaya and the Christian missionaries who came to his court, but that this had not led to any advance in real understanding between them of each others' religious beliefs. San Antonio's account of Ayutthaya provides an interesting Spanish example of this continuing lack of comprehension on the Christian side:

> The royal pagoda is dedicated to the sun, which is one of their gods . . . in this pagoda or varella[4] are to be found the gods of war, of peace, of earth, water, health and sickness, and the god of sleep, which is made with such artifice that it snores as if it were alive. The image of the sun, to which the temple is dedicated, is all of silver, with diamonds for teeth, eyes made of different precious stones, and the right arm made of an unknown stone of inestimable value. It has a hole in its head, into which water is poured that comes out through another hole in a certain part of the body. The Siamese regard this water as blessed and say that its properties make barren women fertile (San Antonio 1604: II part 2: 238).

The Jesuits seem to have been little better than the friars at grasping the essentials of Buddhist doctrine, as is shown by the account of the mission of the Jesuit Baltazar de Sequeira to Siam in 1606 given in the *Relação anual das coisas que fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Jesus nas suas missões* compiled by Padre Fernão Guerreiro. In that year, at the insistence of one Tristão Golaio, a Portuguese merchant living in São Tomé de Meliapor, who, along with several other Portuguese friends and acquaintances of the King of Siam in various parts of the Estado da India, had received a letter from the king inviting him to bring his ships to Siamese ports, Padre Baltazar sailed from São Tomé to Tenasserim and then travelled partly overland and partly by water to Ayutthaya. After many adventures, including seeing one of his companions being eaten by a tiger, he arrived in Ayutthaya and at once began the work of proselytization. In a short time he had baptized many children of different nations and also a Japanese merchant, whose goodness of heart and inclination towards the virtue which Guerreiro claims the Japanese naturally possess. However, he had singularly little success with the adult Thai population and gained only a slightly less garbled idea of Buddhist doctrine from the monks than had San Antonio. Sequeira concluded that Buddhists believed that the world was temporarily without a god to govern its affairs because three gods they had had previously were dead and a fourth was expected to arrive any day. However, 'this great machine of the world' did not really need any god to govern it, because it was already regulated by a

set of rules (*bula*) which one of the previous gods had left behind. The monks would read out these rules to the simple people, who would listen to them 'with hands joined and uplifted and with admirable attention and reverence'. Sequeira describes their festivals, which he says took place according to the phases of the moon. On those days the temples would be opened so that everyone might go in, say their prayers and make their votive offerings. He describes the temples as magnificent and of curious architecture, with long galleries, wide courtyards and spacious chapels on every side. In one of them Sequeira saw 'a statue of an idol eighteen *covados* high which was of their great god'. This may have been one of the colossal so-called eighteen-cubit Buddha images (eighteen cubits being the supposed height of the Buddha when he was on earth), of which many were and still are made in Thailand. He asked an old priest aged ninety, who was the king's uncle and a man of great reputation and authority, where this god was. He replied that he was in the hearts of men. The Jesuit then asked if that god in whom he believed had a body and if it was of the same size as the statue. The old man replied that it was. In that case, said Sequeira, how, being so large, can he enter the hearts of men, who are so small. Not surprisingly, this absurd question reduced the old man to silence and, 'in order not to admit his ignorance, he put off giving his answer until another day'.

Sequeira gives a slightly more accurate picture of some Buddhist practices. He says that each temple had a choir with seats on either side as in Christian churches, so that the monks could chant antiphonally, and that the chanting took place chiefly at nightfall and again at midnight. Very early in the morning the monks would be woken by a bell and would go out into the streets to ask for alms, which they collected in baskets that they carried in their hands. He also describes their funeral ceremonies, stating that the dead were placed in beautifully made and painted wooden coffins, and cremated to the accompaniment of festive dances and music.

Guerreiro maintains that the monks listened politely and intently to Sequeira's exposition of Christian doctrine, but appeared to understand little of what he was trying to teach them. Sequeira also spoke twice to King Ekathotsarot, who showed him 'more hospitality and honour than he shows to his own priests' and 'revealed himself in his discourse as a person of great humanity'. However, he appears to have been less interested in hearing about Christianity than in conveying to Sequeira his desire that 'the Portuguese with their ships frequent his ports, especially the port of his royal city, and for this reason he was not willing to allow the Father to leave until another had come in his place' (Viegas 1930–42: III: 84–7).

Most of the Portuguese Dominicans who worked in Ayutthaya during the 1560s were killed in the Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya in 1569, and most of the Spanish Franciscans and Dominicans who went there in the 1580s and 1590s met a similar fate in the Burmese war of 1584 and the Cambodian war of 1594. None of them achieved more than a handful of conversions. The Jesuits seem to have been hardly more successful, although it is interesting to note that the *Regulamento* of the Jesuit College of São Paulo in Goa of 27 June 1546 stipulates, even at that early date, that among the pupils from Asian countries other than India for whom the college was to make provision there should be six from Melaka, six from the Moluccas, six Chinese, six from Pegu and six from Siam (*ssiões*) (Rego 1947–58: III: 355).

Guerreiro's account of Sequeira's mission to Ayutthaya exemplifies admirably the nature of the relationship that existed at that time betewen the Thais and the Portuguese. The Spanish, although their records often reveal commercial preoccupations similar to those of the Portuguese, never made any concerted attempt to develop their trading relations with Siam; they were more concerned with making, through their missionary endeavours, especially in Cambodia, their new colony in the Philippines an *almacén de la fe* (storehouse of the faith) from which to disseminate Christianity throughout Southeast Asia. The Portuguese, on the other hand, seem from the outset to have always attached more immediate importance to the things of Mammon than to those of God, and certainly in Siam they conducted the business of winning revenue with more zeal and undoubtedly with more success than the winning of souls.

Notes

[1] This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Vth International Conference on Thai Studies held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in July 1993.

[2] Francis Xavier eventually sailed directly to China from Melaka via Singapore in 1552 on board the *Santa Cruz*, a merchant ship carrying a cargo of pepper. She belonged to Diogo Pereira, who was to have accompanied Xavier as Portuguese ambassador to China, but was prevented from so doing by the admiral of the sea and captain-designate of Melaka, Dom Álvaro de Ataide. The events leading up to this voyage and the voyage itself are described by Schurhammer (1982: 584–619).

[3] The word 'pagoda' is thought to be derived either from Sanskrit *bhagavat*, 'holy', or from Persian *but-kadah*, 'shrine'. It was first used by the Portuguese to denote any kind of Hindu or Buddhist temple and even occasionally a mosque. See Yule and Burnell 1903 *sub* Pagoda.

[4] Like 'pagoda', '*varella*' is a Portuguese term of uncertain origin and vague meaning. It is possibly derived from Malay *berhala*, 'idol'. See Yule and Burnell 1903 *sub* Varella.

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