

NOTES ON AN ARTICLE BY RUI D'AVILA LOURIDO

Rui d'Avila Lourido's article "European Trade between Macao and Siam, from its beginnings to 1663" in JSS 84/2 (1996), published June 1999, raises some interesting perspectives. There is one point though where I wish to raise a caveat. The author at p.84, citing Silva Rego, says:

From 1662 to 1668, the French achieved influence at Ayutthaya through the support of the Greek, Constantine Phaulkon, who served as the prime minister of Narai. As a consequence, Portuguese influence in Siam declined from 1662."

The French only arrived in Siam in 1662, in the form of a small party of missionaries from the Missions Etrangères, and they were primarily concerned with the state of the soul of the Cochin-Chinese established there, not with the trade (Bourges 1666). There was no formal trading between Siam and France until the end of 1680, when Andre Deslandes-Boureau came and established the French godown of the Compagnie des Indes Orientales (as his future father-in-law, Francois Martin, makes clear in his Memoirs: 1932 11205–207).

The details of Phaulkon's life are much disputed, but it is generally agreed that he did not come to Siam until 1678 (Van der Cruysse 1991:225), after spending some time in Bantam connected with the office of the East India Company, and being brought by Burnaby who was sent to sort out the murky affairs of the EIC outpost in Ayutthaya (Hutchinson 1940:56).

Thereafter his rise was meteoric, but increasingly I doubt that he ever occupied even the functions of "prime minister", had the post existed at the time. Only some of the French claimed this, and they (like Tachard before Pope Innocent XI in December 1688) cannot be relied upon to be truthful. He does appear to have occupied the functions of phra *khlang* or Barcalon, effectively minister of trade and foreign affairs, but was wise enough to keep a Siamese as the official holder of the post. As all foreigners were obliged to deal with him in this capacity, they assumed an exaggerated opinion of his writ.

The decline of Portuguese influence from 1662 cannot therefore be attributed to the presence of Phaulkon, who did not come to the country for another sixteen years. Nor can it be attributed to the presence of a handful of French Missionaries under the Bishops of Metellopolis, Louis Laneau, and Berythus, Lambert de La Motte. A close reading of the French texts for the period 1685–1688 shows that Portuguese influence remained strong in Ayutthaya, and we know that King Narai sent an embassy to Lisbon via Goa in 1684 which was unfortunately shipwrecked two years later off southern Africa. The loss of Malacca to the Dutch in 1641, then Ceylon, then Cochin in 1663, are much more likely to have led to a decline in Portuguese trade through Siam, but there was apparently a kind of residual affection for the first Western country to come to Siam, with whom relations had been good.