



The Fortress of Bangkok during the siege of 1688, published in Jean Volland des Verquains *Histoire de la Revolution de Siam* (Lille, 1691).





# FOUR UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM DESFARGES, BEAUCHAMP, AND VOLLANT, SURVIVORS OF THE SIEGE OF BANGKOK IN 1688

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## Abstract

These four hitherto unpublished letters were penned by French officers surviving the siege and retreat from the Bangkok fort in 1688. That of General Desfarges written in Pondichery in February 1689 is a follow-up to an earlier report sent to Paris (and never received), and deals with trivial matters, apart from desertions. The letter of the engineer Vollant, and the two written by the former garrison adjutant Beauchamp from prison in Holland in November 1689 try to present their authors' viewpoints on the French disaster. Both were to write longer versions of events, but only Vollant's was published in his lifetime.

## General Introduction

Presented here is a letter from General Desfarges, written in Pondichéry on 27 February 1689, and apparently addressed to the Marquis de Seignelay, Secretary of State for the French Navy and in charge of the Siamese adventure. This is followed by a brief summary of events in Siam (about which Versailles was unaware until early November 1689) by Beauchamp, the chief-of-staff in Siam, dated 1 November 1689 from "the prisons of Middelburg" in the Netherlands. Then comes a much longer letter by the same author from the same place, dated 17 November 1689. Finally we have a letter from the same place with the same date as this last, another letter, this time by Vollant des Verquains, an engineer, sent to Siam like Desfarges and Beauchamp in 1687. Vollant's letter appears to have been destined for the Marquis de Seignelay, who was intended by Beauchamp to be the ultimate recipient of his letter of 17 November.

Desfarges, whose incompetence and cupidity knew no bounds, had not long to live; he was to go on a futile expedition to Phuket and then depart for France in 1690, dying en route, thus avoiding the rope on his return, as his sons charitably observed as they spent his fortune in Martinique. Beauchamp had as much if not more than Desfarges to be ashamed of; the longer of his two letters from prison attempts to whitewash his actions and those of his superior, as does the still longer

version he wrote (BN Fr 8210), probably after his release from prison. This last text had only been published once to date, anonymously, in French, in 1861 until this year. It is not known what became of him; he was presumably released in a general exchange of prisoners in 1690.

Vollant was returning in disgrace, having crossed swords—metaphorically—with his superior, Desfarges, too often during his stay in Siam. He made sure his version of events in Siam appeared during his lifetime, and quickly published his *Histoire de la Révolution de Siam arrivée en l'année 1688* in Lille in 1691. Vollant, a Lille notable, like his architect father, went on to become treasurer of Lille, a knight, and royal counsellor, dying in 1729. His letter here can be seen as a trial run for the published work, which contained corrections to his letter.

Both Beauchamp and Vollant were on board ships seized by the Dutch at the Cape in 1689 and travelled together to their prison in Zeeland. Beauchamp was bringing packets of letters which the Dutch also seized (the War of the Grand Alliance had broken out in 1689) and sent to Holland; among these documents was a self-justifying report by Desfarges which was published in Amsterdam in 1691.

These letters contain few surprises, but confirm what we know from other sources; they throw interesting lights on the character of the authors as much as anything. As Desfarges' and Vollant's works were published in English in 2002,<sup>1</sup> and an English version of Beauchamp's text is now available,<sup>2</sup> it is appropriate that the documents presented here also be made available to non-French speakers.

In these texts, round brackets indicate an uncertain reading of the manuscript, round brackets enclosing periods (....) an unreadable word or phrase, and square brackets editorial additions. Paragraphing in the original texts is minimal; with the exception of Desfarges' short letter, we have broken them up and numbered them. The spelling of names in the seventeenth century was erratic and arbitrary; we have unified them to standard spellings. The particule 'de' or 'du' sometimes appears with certain names and sometimes does not; we have followed the original texts. Titles too appear as in the originals, though 'Sieur' is spelt in full. Dates in the texts are given as ordinal numbers, but as cardinals in the notes.

My sincere thanks go to Monsieur Bernard Suisse in Paris for supplying the original texts of these letters and for his generous encouragement, corrections, and observations. I alone am responsible for any errors.

<sup>1</sup> M. Smithies, trans. and ed. *Three Military Accounts of the 1688 'Revolution' in Siam: Desfarges, La Touche, and Vollant des Verquains*. Bangkok, Orchid Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> M. Smithies, trans. and ed. *Witnesses to a Revolution: Siam, 1688*. Bangkok, The Siam Society, 2004.

## Unpublished letter from General Desfarges to the Marquis de Seignelay<sup>1</sup> From Pondichéry 27 February 1689

### Introduction

There is little to add about the career and character of Desfarges to what appears in our introduction to the translation of his text published in Amsterdam in 1691, and which constitutes the first part of our *Three Military Accounts...* His military career from 1661 to 1687 is outlined in Pinard's *Chronologie historique militaire...* (8 vols, 1760–1778); he served in many of Louis XIV's battles on the changing north-east French frontier, and was rewarded with the sinecure of being the king's lieutenant in Brisach-am-Rhein in 1683, apparently on the recommendation of the king's younger brother, Philippe d'Orléans, known as Monsieur. Desfarges would have bought his initial commission like everyone else, and probably his subsequent promotions.

François Martin, whom Desfarges praises in the unpublished letter which follows, was an acute observer, and says in polite terms in his *Mémoires* (1932: II 519–520) that as Desfarges entered the army when fifteen or sixteen years old he “had perhaps neglected other talents which would have been necessary for him in such a distant enterprise as that in Siam”. In addition to being ill-educated, he readily believed others he thought cleverer than himself. As if this were not enough, Martin adds that he “also appeared extremely covetous, and he did not sustain with sufficient brilliance the position with which the king had honoured him”, that of general commanding his troops in Siam from 1687.

The expedition Desfarges contrived to Phuket in 1689, after the expulsion of French forces from the Bangkok fort on 2 November 1688 and regrouping in Pondichéry, was a total waste of time and Martin doubts if Phuket was actually reached. The French certainly did not occupy the island, which appears to have been the original intention. News of the outbreak of the War of the Grand Alliance in Europe caused Desfarges to return via Bengal to Pondichéry and in February 1690 to set out for France. He died on board the *Oriflamme* en route for Martinique, where his two elder sons, the Marquis and the Chevalier, spent freely of their father's fortune, notably, according to Robert Challe, on women who could have been had in Paris for nothing. They too perished on the return to France, either in a storm in February 1691 or in a naval engagement; the records are contradictory.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not absolutely certain that the intended receiver of this letter was de Seignelay, the Secretary of State for the Navy, but seems most probable, since he was the person in Versailles in charge of the Siamese adventure.

This letter contains the usual epistolary fawning that was expected of the time. It deals with desertions, already a problem in Bangkok and worse in Pondichéry (the hitherto unpublished anonymous *Relation de ce qui s'est passé à Louvo, royaume de Siam, et ce qui s'est passé à Bangkok pendant le siège en 1688*, AN Col. C/1/24 140–272, and published this year gives details of these). It recommends Martin to de Seignelay (assuming with reason that it was to him that Desfarges addressed his letter), and it goes into trivial details about his expenditures, something rather ludicrous in one known to have profited by every possibility for self-enrichment (the 3,000 *livres* claimed to have been borrowed by Phaulkon from Desfarges before the former's imprisonment and death were almost certainly an invention by Desfarges). Lastly Desfarges in the letter complains that his officers were unprofessional and did not support him, complaints which seem petty and in the circumstances absurd (what could Seignelay do about that in Versailles?). Desfarges himself was less than professional in his conduct, especially in his abandoning of Phaulkon and in the treatment he meted out to his widow, in opposition to nearly all his officers, when she tried to take refuge with the French in Bangkok.

### Letter

#### Archives Nationales, Paris : AN Col. C/1/25 f.50r–f.51r

[f.50r] Having been informed that an English vessel was about to leave<sup>2</sup> for Europe, I did not wish to miss this occasion of taking the liberty to inform you of what has occurred since the departure of Sieur de Courcelles who commanded the *Normande*.<sup>3</sup> I had the honour of informing you in my letter that the settlement of Pondichéry was open on all sides, which made me fear that many soldiers might desert. This began with four who wished to enter the service of the Great Mogul,<sup>4</sup> one of whom was a bombardier from Provence, by name Antoine, who expected his knowledge and skill would contribute to his fortune, about whom I spoke in my [previous] letter as having served very well in Bangkok; and one named du Clos, whom Monsieur du Bruant had taken with him to Mergui and who had formerly served under Monsieur de la Haye [f.50v] at Saint-Thomé,<sup>5</sup> where he deserted, and

<sup>2</sup> Most likely from nearby Madras.

<sup>3</sup> This departed Pondichéry on 17 February 1689, accompanied by the *Coche*. Both were seized by the Dutch when they put in at the Cape of Good Hope, unaware of the outbreak of the War of the Grand Alliance. The letters sent by Desfarges on the *Normande*, informing the court of events in Siam, never reached their destination.

<sup>4</sup> Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), under whom the Mogul empire reached its peak.

<sup>5</sup> São Tomé was originally a Portuguese settlement close to Madras, which was invested by the French general de la Haye in July 1672; Martin was brought there by de la Haye from Masulipatam and then sent to start the colony at Pondichéry. The Dutch seized São Tomé in September 1674.

who had since joined the service of the King of Siam. With them [were] two soldiers, one of whom was involved in a plot to desert in Bangkok and who knew how to speak all sorts of languages.<sup>6</sup> But on the good instructions of Monsieur Martin, director of the [French Indies] Company, given to the people on land and in the surrounding area, he was soon informed of this desertion, which obliged me to send my two sons<sup>7</sup> urgently, [as well as] Sieurs du Halgouët and de la Héronnerie and several other of the more sprightly officers, who did not fail to catch up with them. As they approached, the soldier La Tulipe took aim at Sieur du Halgouët, but this officer, quicker on the draw than the soldier, fired at him, knocking him over, and he lay on the ground seriously wounded. The others were taken at the same time and brought back to Pondichéry and the wounded soldier was brought before me; I had him hanged in the sight of all the soldiers. I thought this example was enough for the present, in order to spare the others while leaving them as prisoners until I have need of their services, given the few men at our disposition. The only expenses I had to incur were six *écus* from the King's exchequer to pay the executioner, and I used the money of the dead deserter for the other expenses and to pray to God for him.

Since I have been here, Monseigneur, I have witnessed the prudent conduct of the said Sieur Martin, who well remembers what he saw take place at the siege of Saint-Thomé under Monsieur de la Haye, and I am certain he will always perform very well all the missions given him, for he seems to me to have excellent management, application, and experience for everything concerning affairs in these lands. We waste no time in preparing to follow our plan to depart from here as soon as possible,<sup>8</sup> and [f.51r] desirous of providing the soldiers with clothes and other things, I gave orders to Monsieur de Vertsesalle<sup>9</sup> to distribute apparel to the companies. The said gentleman gave the task to Sieur d'Alvimare, major of the troops, [but] there was so little application, Monseigneur, without exaggeration, that [when] the soldiers in his company were provided with new jerkins, hats, and stockings, one of his soldiers, after selling a new hat he had been given, was about to sell a jerkin, of which we did not have enough for everyone, many things having been damaged. On speaking about this to Sieur d'Alvimare, he told me that he did not concern himself about his company, but [it was the task of] his lieutenant, as if a major should not be concerned with every detail, which I have told him and had remarked upon to him a hundred times. I gave him as an assistant Sieur de Geoffrey,

<sup>6</sup> *Sic.* Desfarges himself only spoke French.

<sup>7</sup> The Marquis and the Chevalier Desfarges; their father actually writes "my two children" but they were grown men.

<sup>8</sup> This was not true. Having formulated the plan to take Phuket, the fleet did not leave Pondichéry until 10 April.

<sup>9</sup> Desfarges' second in command in Bangkok.

one of the wisest officers here, but without reason he is abrupt with him and abuses him so badly that he requests me daily to relieve him of this duty. I can well see that some remedy has to be found, given that this is detrimental to good order. I am greatly grieved, Monseigneur, to importune you on this subject, but I have to concern myself with everything, [and] the principal officers serving under me do not give me all the support they could to assist me.<sup>10</sup> Do believe, Monseigneur, that I shall always do everything so that the King will be pleased with me; this would be the means by which you would also be pleased, and I vouch that I am, Monseigneur, entirely devoted to you for all my life, and with profound respect,

Monseigneur, [I remain]

Your most humble and most obedient Servant

Desfarges

At Pondichéry, on the Coromandel Coast  
27<sup>th</sup> February 1689.

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<sup>10</sup> It would seem to be Desfarges' fault if this were the case. The general shows himself obsessed by the trivial; the Marquis de Seignelay, assuming it was he to whom the letter was addressed, would hardly have been impressed.

## Two unpublished letters from Beauchamp written from the prisons of Middelburg, 1 and 17 November 1689

### Introduction

Major Beauchamp, who occupied the position of chief-of-staff or garrison adjutant<sup>1</sup> to General Desfarges in Siam from 1687, does not appear from the records as a particularly attractive character. We unfortunately know nothing about Beauchamp's career before going to Siam in 1687 or after his release from prison in the Netherlands in 1690. But from his three texts dealing with his brief stay in Siam, we can see that he boasts and blusters, he fawns to his superior, he lies, he obtained charge of the jewels Mme Phaulkon managed to save and had no intention of returning them to her, and he possibly murdered his colleague, the scrupulous Chevalier de Fretteville, in order to obtain the diamonds he was holding on her behalf.

He is also incoherent whenever he is involved in actions at crucial junctures, as when Phaulkon, whom he was accompanying to the Lopburi palace on 18 May 1688, was arrested by Phetracha, or when he, a designated hostage in the retreat from the Bangkok fort of 2 November, skipped detention and calmly boarded the *Oriflamme*, along with the other designated hostage, the Chevalier Desfarges, and the factor Véret, who was supposed to remain in Siam as co-guarantor (with the Bishop of Metellopolis, Louis Laneau) for the return of the two Siamese vessels loaned to the French.

In addition, he is forever talking about his suspicions of the Siamese, their intended treachery, but does nothing about this, and gives the impression of going along with the tide of events. He bravely talks of killing Phetracha when his plot is revealed, but of course did not lift a finger. In short, he is an unreliable witness to events in which he took part.

Yet his accounts (in addition to the two letters here, there is that published anonymously in the *Cabinet Historique* in Paris in 1861, taken from the manuscript BN Fr 8210 said to be by another officer, Pinsonneau, but in fact, as internal evidence makes clear, by Beauchamp) can be used, and often contain information not found elsewhere. However, anything he says has to be treated with extreme caution; he was too concerned with the necessity of whitening his (and Desfarges') role in the less glorious events of 1688.

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<sup>1</sup> Since he was hardly ever in the fort in Bangkok, the first designation is probably more appropriate. Tachard called him "major in command of the [Bangkok] fortress", but de Vertesalle, Desfarges' deputy, was really that.



He does all he can to blacken the character of Phaulkon, the idol of the Jesuits, but what he says about his being out of favour with King Narai about March and April does not square with most other accounts; his suspicions about Phaulkon's motives are justified, but then he was warned by La Loubère before he left for France at the beginning of 1688 that the Greek was not to be trusted.

His omissions are equally interesting. He makes no mention, in either letter here (though he does allude in passing to the subject in his much longer BN Fr 8210), of the two councils called by Desfarges to decide the fate of Mme Phaulkon (both of which supported taking her to France) after she had arrived at Bangkok flying the French flag and bringing two letters of Louis XIV, claiming sanctuary. Beauchamp's extended text BN Fr 8210 seems to be the only one that has de l'Estrille coming up to inspect the fortress and support Desfarges' intention of abandoning it; others claim that the supplies acquired for the journey to Pondichéry and additional men (both French and English) meant that Desfarges could have forced his exit from Bangkok with Mme Phaulkon, had he chosen. It was Beauchamp who saw her off the premises when she was finally handed back to the Siamese, and both he and Desfarges must have been well aware that the treaty drawn up guaranteeing her rights would not be respected. But the allure of keeping her jewels rather than returning them to their rightful owner was too great for both of them. Neither profited by them: Desfarges, as we have seen, died on the return journey to France, and Beauchamp was stripped of his assets by the Dutch at the Cape.

Vollant des Verquains, no friend of Beauchamp, whom he saw as a tool of Desfarges, whom Vollant despised, has a telling passage about Beauchamp in his 1691 published account of events, at the juncture when Phaulkon was sending emissaries to Bangkok to try and get Desfarges to come to Louvo with 84 men in early April as he had promised. "The chief-of-staff promised to serve him [Phaulkon] with all the credit he had acquired over the sentiments of Mr Desfarges, to convince him to do what he should. He left Louvo fully aware of the great need Mr Constance had of being supported in an action on which depended the success or failure of everything. But the like of such fickleness and eccentricity in any action had never been seen. The chief-of-staff, on arriving in Bangkok, had only begun to speak of the object of his journey, than he was told to be silent, and seeing that he was stopped at the first step and that he would not help his cause by speaking further in favour of Mr Constance, he did a complete volte-face, going from black to white, deciding to approve loudly the actions of Mr Desfarges, especially in his presence, where he never had the courage to offer the least truth which might be in anyway disagreeable to the general, and dangerous to his position, though it might be most important to the interests of our king."

The first of the two letters, which is stated to be a copy and is neatly penned, is very brief, and summarizes the tumultuous events in Siam in 1688 in very few words. It was only at the beginning of November 1689 that news reached Paris of the disaster in Siam, and Beauchamp's letter may have been instrumental in announcing this. The second letter, in a more mannered hand, and much longer, appears to be, as it were, a dry run for his still longer account we refer to as BN Fr 8210, published anonymously once in Paris long after the event, in 1861.

**Letter of 1 November 1689**  
**Archives Nationales, Paris : AN Col. C/1/25 ff.91r–92r**

[f.91r] {1} I have the honour of indicating to you that M. Desfarges sent me to bring you packets [of letters] about the revolution which occurred in the kingdom of Siam on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1688.<sup>2</sup> The king is dead; his two brothers were placed in two velvet sacks and beaten to death with sandalwood clubs; Monpit, his adopted son, was cut into three, having been seized in the king's chamber, and M. Constance was cut into two. Opra Phetracha, who was one of the most important persons in the kingdom, made himself king, and having caused the death of everyone in the royal house.<sup>3</sup>

{2} All the nationalities in the kingdom conspired against us to bring about our death too,<sup>4</sup> but in spite of all their efforts we held out five months and four days,<sup>5</sup> razed the fortress to the west [of Bangkok] with cannon shots, and split some of those cannons in it, spiking the rest. We were only two hundred men in the fortress, which was incomplete on the side facing land, and animals could enter it anywhere. They [the Siamese] constructed eight forts<sup>6</sup> around the stronghold at the distance of a musket shot, all supplied with cannons. What we most feared were the bombs they threw at us, because of the stores which were only made of bamboo, [f.91v] but they caused no damage. They sent M. de Metellopolis<sup>7</sup> to discuss a settlement, and it was agreed that they would give us vessels and victuals [along] with all the Frenchmen and Englishmen who were in Siam. This they did, and we left on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.<sup>8</sup> If we had had victuals and munitions, we would not have left so soon, though it was impossible to remain there, having so few men. We set

<sup>2</sup> All events leading up to the coup, including Desfarges' abandoning of Phaulkon, are omitted.

<sup>3</sup> This bald summary of events omits mention of the fate of Narai's only child, the Princess Yothathep, who was forced to marry the usurper.

<sup>4</sup> There were apparently Indian Muslims fighting alongside the Siamese against the French, but Beauchamp appears to have more in mind the Dutch here.

<sup>5</sup> Actually one day less than five months, but it depends on what counts as the date of departure.

<sup>6</sup> Vollant has nine.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Laneau, the senior bishop and apostolic delegate.

<sup>8</sup> Beauchamp makes no mention of the appearance of Mme Phaulkon in the Bangkok fort.

sail for Pondichéry with M. de l'Estrille<sup>9</sup> who had arrived on [20<sup>th</sup>] September,<sup>10</sup> and we arrived on 10<sup>th</sup> February [1689], where we found M. du Bruant, who had withdrawn from Mergui on St John's day,<sup>11</sup> [and] who had no more than twenty soldiers [left] from his garrison.

{3} The review of the remaining troops was conducted by M. Desfarges and M. de La Salle, commissioner; [they] numbered three hundred and thirty men, but many were sick. He [Desfarges] was to leave on (15<sup>th</sup>) March to take the island of Jonsalem<sup>12</sup> in the Straits of Malacca, belonging to the King of Siam.<sup>13</sup>

{4} I left on 17<sup>th</sup> February on the store-ship the *Normande*, commanded by M. de Courcelles, and we arrived on 26<sup>th</sup> April at the Cape of Good Hope, where we were taken, having had no news of the war.<sup>14</sup> The [French Company vessel, the] *Coche* arrived [there] on 4<sup>th</sup> May and was taken, its captain killed. Everyone was held in the fortress for two months, after having been [f.92r] despoiled when the vessels were taken. When the fleet was ready to leave for Holland, the commander at the Cape had all of us searched, even having us stand only in our shirts, to see if anything remained with us, and we set sail on 29<sup>th</sup> June. M. de Courcelles died from grief. We arrived on 29<sup>th</sup> October in Middelburg where we are prisoners.

{5} I would like, Monseigneur, to write to you about how events turned out, but I hope you will have the goodness to have me removed from here soon, as I am not able to do so, having no freedom to write, for we are held here in a closely guarded prison where we have only four *sous* to spend each day.

<sup>9</sup> Commander of Louis XIV's man-of-war bringing reinforcements, the *Oriflamme*.

<sup>10</sup> The date is in the binding and cannot be read; in the second letter Beauchamp says the *Oriflamme* arrived on 20 September.

<sup>11</sup> 24 June.

<sup>12</sup> Modern Phuket.

<sup>13</sup> This was what was decided at the first council held on 5 February according to François Martin (*Mémoires* 1934 III: 27). Beauchamp is not listed by Martin as taking part in the council, nor does Beauchamp claim to have been present at it, though he was still in Pondichéry at that date. In fact, the departure for Phuket took place on "10 April at four in the morning" according to Martin (*ibid*: 37)

<sup>14</sup> The War of the Grand Alliance, which pitched most of Europe against Louis XIV.

**Letter of 17 November 1689**  
**Archives Nationales, Paris : AN Col. C/1/25 ff.73r–82v**

**Preamble**

[f.73r] Monsieur,<sup>15</sup>

I am most obliged to you, and to M.<sup>16</sup> de Céberet,<sup>17</sup> for having procured for me the honour of knowing you. I would like to be sufficiently delighted to find occasions to return all the goodness you have shown towards me. I thank you most humbly for the offers you make [of the services] of MM (Sandras<sup>18</sup>) and (.....). I have found here a friend who has provided me with some money, and I request you, Sir, to continue with your (kindness) and to do all that you can to have me exchanged.<sup>19</sup> These gentlemen here<sup>20</sup> are not at all reasonable, and give us no freedom to see anyone. I have the honour to be known to the Marquis de Villette, [and] do not doubt that he will do what he can to have me depart from here. I am writing to him and request you to ensure that my letter reaches his hands. I gave myself the honour of writing twice to Monseigneur the Marquis de Seignelay, but my letters were not delivered to him. I find no safer means of writing to him than that with which [you] provide me. I request you to ensure he receives it swiftly. I implore you to be assured that I am, Sir,

Your most humble and obedient Servant.

Beauchamp

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<sup>15</sup> It is not known to whom this letter was addressed. It was certainly not the Marquis de Seignelay (Secretary of State for the Navy and in charge of the Siamese venture), who would be addressed as Monsiegnour, as would the Marquis de Villette mentioned here, but it was clearly someone who had access to de Seignelay. The text of Beauchamp's long account (published anonymously in 1861) in BN Fr. 8210 ff.506r–570r, was addressed to Monseigneur, most probably Seignelay.

<sup>16</sup> In this text, Monsieur is consistently abbreviated to "Mons." We have retained the form "M." in conformity with the other transcriptions.

<sup>17</sup> The envoy-extraordinary and director of the French Indies Company sent with La Loubère to Siam in 1687.

<sup>18</sup> Gatién de Courtilz, Lord of Sandras (1644–1712) was a colourful character gravitating between Paris and The Hague, part-soldier, part-author of scabrous court title-tattle which bought him nine years in the Bastille.

<sup>19</sup> In an exchange of prisoners.

<sup>20</sup> The Dutch.

## Letter<sup>21</sup>

[f.73v] {1} I should tell you, Sir, that after the [king's] vessels had left for Europe,<sup>22</sup> M. de Constance only allowed M. du Bruant to leave<sup>23</sup> a month later, which was on 3<sup>rd</sup> February.<sup>24</sup> M. de Constance requested 50 men. M. Desfarges told him that some of his soldiers were sick; they agreed that he would send him 34 [men] and two officers, who were Sainte-Marie and Suart, who would command the two [Siamese] vessels, with an order which M. Constance placed in their hands together with the order to go and hunt out pirates. M. Desfarges saw the order which these two officers showed him, that to go and hunt out pirates, and another order which the said Sieur Constance had given to go and burn the English vessels in the roads of the town of Madras, on the Coromandel Coast.<sup>25</sup> Sieurs de Sainte-Marie and Suart wrote to M. de Constance that they could not do that, as it was the wrong season. M. Constance wrote to them telling them to leave and stay out at sea where they willed, and only to return in four months.

{2} These vessels had hardly departed than M. de Constance requested a company of cadets to form the king's guard.<sup>26</sup> M. Desfarges, very surprised that his troops were being dispersed, told M. de Constance that he could refuse the king nothing, but he implored him to inform him that he had many sick men, and that a person of his standing could not remain in a stronghold without troops, it not being fortified and open on all sides, as M. Constance had seen, but as soon as the [Siamese] vessels returned, he would send them. M. de Constance nevertheless sent horses to exercise them,<sup>27</sup> and sent an order to M. Desfarges on behalf of the king to send me to [the city of] Siam<sup>28</sup> immediately with 100 Siamese<sup>29</sup> and French officers to command them. Following this order, M. Desfarges sent me off with the Jesuit Father [de] Bèze,<sup>30</sup> who had brought the order. All that took place on 15<sup>th</sup> February. I

<sup>21</sup> There are only 13 paragraph divisions in the original; for ease of reading others have here been added.

<sup>22</sup> On 2 January 1688, according to Vollant.

<sup>23</sup> To take up his duties, with his troops, as commander of Mergui, the Siamese outpost on the Bay of Bengal.

<sup>24</sup> This means that the vessels probably left on 3 January.

<sup>25</sup> The text here is confusing; the phrase "but did not see" seems to be missing. According to BN Fr 8210, Sainte-Marie concealed Phaulkon's second order to go and attack vessels at Madras.

<sup>26</sup> Phaulkon even sent bolts of blue cloth to provide them uniforms.

<sup>27</sup> The text can be interpreted in the sense that the cadets would exercise on the horses, or that the horses would be exercised; the former seems more likely. This is confirmed by de Bèze (Hutchinson 1968: 71): Desfarges "asked for horses to be sent to Bangkok and on the pretext that the youths had not yet qualified, he continued to keep them from going."

<sup>28</sup> Ayutthaya; however, this seems to be written in error, and Louvo (Lopburi) is intended.

<sup>29</sup> To the chagrin of the French, Siamese troops were also stationed in the Bangkok fort.

<sup>30</sup> One of originally 14 Jesuit mathematicians sent to Siam the previous year, at Phaulkon's request.

found on going up [f.74r] Sieurs Sainte-Marie and Suart who were setting out to sea. When I arrived at Louvo, M. de Constance asked me to go and seek him out at Telipson<sup>31</sup> with the troops. He told me to lodge the soldiers in the houses which had been constructed for the [French] ambassadors.<sup>32</sup> Two days later, he took me with him, Fr de Bèze as well, along with 20 musketeers he told me to bring, to go to the mines where M. Véret<sup>33</sup> was [to be found] and who was working them. The evening of our arrival, M. Constance told me to place guards on all the approaches I thought (fit), which gave me the suspicion that something was afoot. In the morning, I entered (the chamber) of the said Sieur Constance and requested him to tell me if something was happening in the kingdom, then he could do me the honour of confiding in me. He told me he saw that the Siamese were desirous of revolting, but he was not sure of this; however, the Bishop of Metellopolis and [the Abbé] de Lionne<sup>34</sup> said they were well aware of it. We remained two days after visiting all their mines, and we returned to Telipson where the king remained.

{3} In the month of March, the king returned to Louvo.<sup>35</sup> I went back and forth between Bangkok and Louvo to send workmen and what was necessary to fortify the stronghold. The king became very sick. M. Constance sent an order to M. Desfarges to come up to Louvo. On arriving there, M. Constance told him that Opra Phetracha, grand chamberlain at the palace, and Mon Pit, the adopted son of the king, planned to pillage the palace when the king died, that the king had said to his daughter, the princess, that he wished to make his brother king,<sup>36</sup> and that Opra Phetracha, having flogged him,<sup>37</sup> could not remain in the kingdom, and that it would be shameful [for] the French to let the palace be pillaged in this manner. He said to M. Desfarges that he must come up with troops, that he (would go) to offer his services to the king's princely brothers who were in the palace in [the city of] Siam. M. Desfarges told M. Constance that it [f.74v] would be good to speak to me about this; he said he would do so. M. Desfarges and the Jesuit Fathers Le Blanc and de Bèze told me what Opra Phetracha and Mon Pit intended to do. I said to M. Desfarges and to the said Fathers that it was not necessary for the troops to come up for that,

<sup>31</sup> Tale Chupson, a few kilometres outside Lopburi, where King Narai had a secondary residence.

<sup>32</sup> Originally intended for Chaumont and his party in 1685, they were used by Céberet and La Loubère, and lay adjacent to Phaulkon's residence in the town.

<sup>33</sup> The factor or head of the French Indies Company in Ayutthaya.

<sup>34</sup> Respectively Louis Laneau and Artus de Lionne, missionaries based in the capital Ayutthaya. De Lionne was styled Bishop of Rosalie from 1687, but did not use the title until some years later.

<sup>35</sup> BN Fr 8210 f.511v says that the king, being unwell, returned to Lopburi at the beginning of April.

<sup>36</sup> His younger half-brother, of whom the princess was said to be fond. The elder was incapable.

<sup>37</sup> The story is long: Chao Fa Noi was found to be having an affair with a sister of Phetracha who was also one of King Narai's concubines; for this the king had Noi flogged by both Phetracha and Pit, leaving him bloated and, it was said, speechless.

and I would undertake to arrest him provided the king (gave) me an order, and my head could roll if I did not (place) him in his hands.<sup>38</sup> M. Constance rejected that absolutely and said one should not do that. M. Desfarges took leave of him the next day to return to Bangkok and M. Constance told him that he would write to him when he should come up [again].

{4} At the beginning of April it was thought that the king was close to death. M. Constance wrote to M. Desfarges to come up with some troops. He selected 80 men and some officers,<sup>39</sup> and went as far as [the city of] Siam, but everyone in the kingdom thought the king was dead. This was the reason why, when M. Desfarges was outside [the city of] Siam, everyone thought the French were going to pillage the palace. M. Desfarges lodged at (.....) and went to [the French] godown to see M. Véret, who told him that M. Constance was a traitor and a villain and that he wished to kill his troops.<sup>40</sup> M. Desfarges did not wish to concur with him, and went to the other side of the river to visit the Bishop of Metellopolis and [the Abbé] de Lionne, who told him everything would be lost if he went up [to Louvo], saying that the king was dead, and that for some time M. Constance was not in the king's favour and was closely watched; and that his son had died in March,<sup>41</sup> and everyone had got ready with the bishop and the Missionaries who expected him at the (church) to bury his son who was to come from Louvo, but he was not allowed to leave, neither with him nor his wife from that place, which showed that he did not have the authority people thought.

[f.75r] {5} M. Desfarges wrote, sending an officer<sup>42</sup> who arrived in Louvo at midnight, to M. de Constance [saying] that he had arrived with the troops in [the city of] Siam, where M. Desfarges waited for him to go and offer his services to the two brothers of the king who were in the palace in [the city of] Siam. Whilst waiting for M. Constance's reply, he withdrew to a customs' house<sup>43</sup> a league's distance from [the city of] Siam. M. de Constance replied that he could not go and requested him to come to Louvo. M. Desfarges sent another officer<sup>44</sup> to him (by whom) he

<sup>38</sup> This is typical bluster on the part of Beauchamp.

<sup>39</sup> BN Fr 8210 says 84 men, presumably including four officers.

<sup>40</sup> Beauchamp omits to tell us that Véret was the sworn enemy of Phaulkon.

<sup>41</sup> Beauchamp is suspect here. De Bèze has his younger son João dying in early January, shortly after the departure of the French vessels for France; BN Fr 8210 says he died in April. The Jesuit is in this matter probably more reliable, and the child's body is most unlikely to have been kept in Lopburi for burial two months later in Ayutthaya. This seems to be one of many instances in Beauchamp's account where he tries to belittle the standing of Phaulkon. Phaulkon's elder son Jorge survived into adulthood.

<sup>42</sup> Named correctly as Le Roy in BN Fr 8210, but who is there said to have arrived at 10 p.m.

<sup>43</sup> The text has "to a Tabanque"; there was only one in Ayutthaya, which was used by the French envoys before their formal entry into the city.

<sup>44</sup> Named as Dacieux (d'Assieu) in BN Fr 8210.

informed him that if he did not go [to Louvo] (he ought to withdraw) to Bangkok. M. Constance replied that he could come up and that the king was not dead. M. Desfarges did not wish to believe this, given that Monsiegnur the bishop had assured him that he was [dead], and decided to withdraw to Bangkok. As M. Constance saw that M. Desfarges had returned and [he] could not have [the services of] his troops, he sent Father [Le] Royer to ask for a company of cadets with an order from the king which he had composed without the king knowing about it, but M. Desfarges informed him he could not oblige, since he had many sick men. He [Constance] sent two days afterwards through the Fathers to ask for them and (put) them in establishments in [the city of] Siam in order to cure them.

{6} M. Desfarges sent me to Louvo to indicate to him that we had only one surgeon, and that if we sent them, there would be no surgeon to attend to the officers. He told me he would give me a Frenchman named Charbonneau,<sup>45</sup> and sent for him, and when he had arrived, he told M. Constance in front of me that he could not undertake this obligation, which made him very angry; and things stayed like that.

{7} I returned to Bangkok in May, and went back to Louvo to seek iron for [the cannon] mountings and some charcoal. M. Constance [f.75v] told me he would give orders for this to be supplied and asked me to stay with him. I told him I greatly regretted not being able to do so without an order from M. Desfarges. He said he would take care of that. M. Desfarges wrote to say I could (stay). On 18<sup>th</sup> May 1688<sup>46</sup> at three in the afternoon, Opra Phetracha brought his troops inside the palace. M. Constance sent for me and told me the king wished to arrest Opra Phetracha. I told him that it was he [Phetracha] who wished to be master of the palace, and if that were so, we should withdraw to his house and defend ourselves with the Siamese soldiers and his company of bodyguards numbering (some) 16 Englishmen and three French officers who commanded the Siamese troops, together with the Chevalier Desfarges, and Sieur de Fretteville, who was ever close to M. Constance. But the said gentleman said to me we should not do that. Opra Phetracha sent for him and [he] told me to go with him. We met on the way Sieurs [de] Fretteville and Desfarges, and [he] told them to follow him. As we entered the palace and were [standing] in front of a pavilion, Opra Phetracha ordered us to be

<sup>45</sup> René Charbonneau was an extraordinary person; after working as a valet in the Saint-Lazare mission in Paris, he had come to Siam as a lay Missionary brother specializing in medicine, and was ordered by King Narai to construct a fort on the frontier with Pegu, which he did successfully. He was then made governor of Phuket. He withdrew from public life to be with his wife, of Portuguese extraction, in Ayutthaya, probably seeing which way the wind was blowing with the rise and inevitable fall of Phaulkon. He stayed on Siam and died there at the age of 88. This incident of Charbonneau being sent for does not appear in BN Fr 8210.

<sup>46</sup> The date is confirmed in BN Fr 8210.



disarmed and M. Constance was seized. I did not wish to hand over my sword, because I was ever waiting for the moment when he [Constance] would tell me to use it, because I was in a position to kill Opra Phetracha, for I thought the king wanted to arrest him as M. de Constance had told me.<sup>47</sup> I was soon disabused for he took M. Constance by the hand and led him off a couple of steps to have his head cut off by a mandarin who had his raised sabre ready, and at that moment he requested me to hand over my sword. I placed it in the hands of the son of Opra Phetracha<sup>48</sup> [f.76r] and whilst he was threatening to cut off his head, M. Constance spoke to Opra Phetracha who took him off with him, and we were taken and placed in a guard room by the second ambassador who had been to France.<sup>49</sup> Two hours later, M. de Constance came into the room where we were, accompanied by Opra Phetracha, who said to me, “You are well off here, at this time.” I did not understand what he meant. Opra Phetracha took him into another room, and after that (I) did not see him [again]. They started by burning the soles of his feet. On 20<sup>th</sup> May, Opra Phetracha seized Mon Pi, the adopted son of the king, in the king’s chamber, cut him into three,<sup>50</sup> and threw his remains before M. Constance saying to him, “There, this (is the person) you wanted to make king.” We were taken inside an antechamber and led off to Telipson. We stayed there five or six days and then we were sent for by Opra Phetracha and were taken to Louvo, where after we arrived I was taken with M. de Lionne, who had come instead of Monseigneur the bishop of Metellopolis who was sick at that time. After we entered the palace, he [Phetracha] asked M. de Lionne and me if M. Desfarges would come up. We said we did not know. He asked what I thought. I told him that if I went, he would come up. He told me to go with M. de Lionne and the first two ambassadors who had come from France.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> There is a great deal more bravado on Beauchamp’s part in BN Fr 8210, all probably untrue; it seems that in fact Beauchamp meekly surrendered. Faced with considerably greater numbers, he and his two companions really had no choice. His BN Fr 8210 text also tries to make out that Phaulkon appeared afraid; foolhardy he may have been, but no other text implies this. One has to remember that when Beauchamp was writing de Fretteville was dead (possibly killed by Beauchamp himself), so was the Chevalier Desfarges (though Beauchamp probably did not know this). There was no one around to contradict him.

<sup>48</sup> Sorosak, who later wished to add Mme Phaulkon to his harem.

<sup>49</sup> Ok-luang Kanlaya Ratchamaitri. Beauchamp’s account of this crucial juncture of events is extremely confused. If one ignores the bluster, he apparently did nothing to save Phaulkon or dispose of Phetracha.

<sup>50</sup> This detail is repeated in BN Fr 8210; the date is not.

<sup>51</sup> The first, Ok-phra Wisut Sunthorn, Kosa Pan, was about to become, if he was not already, Barcalon, *Phra Khlang*, minister charged with foreign affairs and trade. BN Fr 8210 adds here remarks about Phaulkon not being in a predicament if he had followed his advice. He said he refused to accept Phaulkon’s clothes in lieu of his own which had been seized.

{8} We went to Bangkok. I thought that these ambassadors wished to occupy the stronghold if M. Desfarges did not wish to go up. They were accompanied by 4–5,000 men, but they had been dispersed along the river [bank] so that they could not be seen. (They said) to M. Desfarges that Opra Phetracha<sup>52</sup> had been arrested on behalf of the king for having embezzled the [f.76v] state revenues and the king ordered him to go up.<sup>53</sup> I did not fail to (inform) M. Desfarges of all that had occurred, and likewise M. de Lionne advised him to go up, but I, knowing the unscrupulous nature of these people, told him that if he trusted me he would not go up. He told me that his stronghold was not in a position to be defended, and it would be better that he sacrificed himself to give us the time to put things aright. Being decided to leave, he asked the first ambassador if he had anything else to say to him before leaving, as once he was outside, he would have no authority. The ambassador said he had nothing else to ask of him. M. Desfarges called the officers together and said to M. de Vertesalle,<sup>54</sup> who was in charge in his absence, that he was leaving for Louvo and taking his eldest son<sup>55</sup> with him to give them<sup>56</sup> more confidence, but he did not doubt (that they were going to arrest) him and his sons to have the stronghold capitulate; but he said to M. de Vertesalle in the presence of all the officers that these people could (keep) him to obtain the stronghold, but he and his two sons<sup>57</sup> should [rather] be hung [than that they should capitulate] and he was to defend himself to the last of his men. “This is the order I am giving you, in the presence of all these officers, and [you must] work at once at putting the stronghold in order and constructing palisades.”<sup>58</sup> [He] left with the said ambassadors and M. de Lionne.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> This is clearly an error for M. Constance.

<sup>53</sup> There is no mention in this letter of the bribe apparently offered by Kosa Pan to Desfarges, namely to take over the offices of Phaulkon until such time as his son, the Marquis, was capable of handling affairs: but it is clearly stated in Beauchamp’s account BN Fr 8210 (f.528v); see also Vollant 2002: 132.

<sup>54</sup> His deputy commander.

<sup>55</sup> The Marquis Desfarges.

<sup>56</sup> The Siamese.

<sup>57</sup> The younger son, the Chevalier Desfarges, was already in Lopburi and held prisoner with other French officers.

<sup>58</sup> Beauchamp’s version in BN Fr 8210 is much more prolix. He has Desfarges saying to Vertesalle “I am going up with my son; kindly oversee and advance the construction work in hand and be in a position to defend yourselves well. I do not doubt that they are taking me with my children to make the fortress surrender, and that they are preparing for us terrible tortures, but whatever happens I desire and order you to let me and my children be hanged, and you must defend yourselves to the last man.” Fine words, especially when one remembers that the real reason he was going up was the hope of securing Phaulkon’s offices for himself and his eldest son.

<sup>59</sup> On 27 May according to BN Fr 8210.

{9} When he had arrived in Louvo, he was taken to speak with Opra Phetracha [who] asked M. Desfarges why he had not come up [before].<sup>60</sup> He replied that when he was outside the city of Siam, everyone began to shout and agitate, saying that the French were going to pillage the palace, which obliged him to return so that they did not think [f.77r] that the French were capable of such actions, and that he had orders from the king his master to supply every service that the King of Siam desired of him. Then Opra Phetracha told him to order his troops to come up. M. Desfarges told him that he had no authority when he was outside his stronghold. Then he [Phetracha] ordered him to be arrested. M. de Lionne, who was beside him, said to the ambassador that he should recall what M. Desfarges had told him in Bangkok, that when he was outside his stronghold, he was not (the master). The ambassador related that to Opra Phetracha who asked him [Desfarges] if he would come back [to Louvo] if he returned [first to Bangkok]. He said yes, and with that Opra Phetracha told him he would keep his two sons and would look after them; following that, he ordered him to write to M. du Bruant to bring his troops and join [them to] his, to go and wage war against the Laos. You would understand all this was but deceit. M. du Bruant, on receiving the letter, thought that he had been arrested, since it gave him to understand that it was dictated [by Phetracha], which greatly helped him to be wary. M. Desfarges learnt from his son<sup>61</sup> and the other officers who were in Louvo who had tried to escape from Louvo and come to Bangkok, and had been chased until they were two leagues<sup>62</sup> away from [the city of] Siam. They were taken by 4–500 men. They were tied to their horses' tails, beaten with sticks, and were made to run as fast as the horses could go. One named de Bressy, an engineer, whom M. Constance had recalled from Mergui, died in their hands from the mistreatment he received. [They] were taken to Louvo where they were exposed to [f.77v] the people who spat in their faces, rained (blows on them) with their (slippers) and [suffered] all kinds of indignities, and afterwards had their feet fettered and ropes tied round their necks.<sup>63</sup> They were freed when M. Desfarges arrived.

{10} He returned to Bangkok on Whit Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June.<sup>64</sup> A ship passed going downstream heading for China. M. Desfarges began firing at it which greatly inconvenienced it. If we had had two longboats, we would have taken it. There was a [French] company in the fort on the west side; as we could not retain it, M. Desfarges told Vollant to blow it up, but he said that could not be done. I went to the

<sup>60</sup> He was asked to reply to three questions from Phetracha, according to other texts; see Vollant's letter of 17 November 1689.

<sup>61</sup> The Chevalier.

<sup>62</sup> A league was approximately 4 km.

<sup>63</sup> This incident appears in nearly all the texts, though with a varying number of French participants: BN Fr 8210 names five officers, Chevaliers Desfarges and de Fretteville, Saint-Vandrilte, de Lasse, and des Targes, and the engineer de Bressy.

<sup>64</sup> This is an error; Whit Sunday was on 6 June in 1688. The error is corrected in BN Fr 8210.

other side [of the river] to tell La Cressonnière who was in command on the other side to have all the cannons split, and to spike those which could not be split. I sent him 20 reinforcements to (do the job) more quickly and as soon as that was done, he at once withdrew, but the Siamese entered it after we had abandoned it. [They] found the means of restoring the cannons which could not be spiked, and had some brought from [the city of] Siam. [They] began to fire cannons and even bombs, which we feared might burn our stores which were only covered with (palm) leaves, but by good fortune none caused any damage, even though fired by the Dutch.<sup>65</sup> We razed their fortress with cannon shots.

{ 11 } M. Desfarges wanted to send off a boat belonging to M. Véret which was at Bangkok; Sieur Véret was also there. It was commanded by a lieutenant named Saint-Qri<sup>66</sup> [f.78r] with 15 men on board, to go and seek out the two vessels commanded by Suart and Sainte-Marie, who, as I have mentioned above, were at sea. When it was three leagues away from Bangkok in the river, it was surrounded by a number of galleys and barges filled with men. The pilot on board fled with two or three of his men. When Sieur Saint-Qri saw that, he put all his grenades on the deck and, when they had boarded his boat and he saw that [his vessel] was full of people, he set fire to the powder, and burnt himself [alive], and all the Siamese, who (probably) numbered 200.

{ 12 } Opra Phetracha made M. Desfarges' two sons, who were in Louvu with their feet fettered and ropes round their necks, write [to their father] and say in the letter that if he did not come up, he was going to hang them. They sent the letter by a Siamese who placed it behind a lime kiln near the stronghold's moat. They shouted to us from the other, western side that it was near there. I sent a man to find it, who brought it, and in it they informed M. Desfarges, their father, that if he did not come up, Opra Phetracha was going to have them hanged. He sent a reply [saying] that he was most grieved about this, but that they could not die more gloriously for so great a monarch such as he whom they served, and that he would avenge their death. We thought he would have put them to death, but when Opra Phetracha saw the strength of purpose of M. Desfarges, he sent them back to him, and began to have constructed forts all around the stronghold at the distance of a musket or pistol shot, [and] filled with cannons; they built (eight)<sup>67</sup> without our being able to stop them, and all along the river [f.78v] as far as the bar everything was strengthened, and they closed the river with stakes, apart from a small entrance

<sup>65</sup> The French were insistent that the Dutch helped the Siamese in the siege. Whilst indirect assistance might have been given, it seems unlikely that there would have been direct involvement, as the two countries at this point in time were at peace.

<sup>66</sup> This is one of the many variants of his name (others being Saint-Cri, Saint-Christ etc). The incident which follows appears in nearly all the French texts, with differing details.

<sup>67</sup> Vollant says nine.

for vessels. In spite of all the resources of the (kingdom), we held out five months and four days. They became weary on seeing the resistance which we put up.

{13} Opra Phetracha sent M. de Metellopolis to (discuss) a truce. They used him, although they had pillaged his house, and stolen 30,000 *livres* in silver from him,<sup>68</sup> and told him that if he did not find the means to remove the French from Bangkok, they would place him in the mouth of a cannon. M. de Lionne had withdrawn with (eight) missionaries to Bangkok. M. de Metellopolis was taken from [the city of] Siam into the western fortress. He began to shout to M. de Lionne [telling him] to come to the other side. We replied that he was sick, being afraid they would retain him. They were obliged to let M. de Metellopolis come over and discussions were begun about [our] departure and buying vessels and victuals. We said that we were not in a position to do that. It was decided some time after that they would give us [these] in a peace treaty made with Opra Phetracha, who was king. All this revolution (occurred) while the king was alive, Sieur de Constance being dead during the time he<sup>69</sup> went up to Louvo. His body was sliced in two and his wife placed in a stable, and shown to the people. The son of Opra Phetracha took her and installed her in his residence.<sup>70</sup> The two brothers of the king were placed in velvet sacks and beaten [to death] with sandalwood clubs. The king died a few days later,<sup>71</sup> and before dying, he had distributed to the Jesuit Fathers 50 *écus* each.<sup>72</sup>

{14} I [now] return to the peace treaty which we drew up, and which necessity obliged us to concede, as we had neither wood, nor victuals, nor money, (only) rice, but it was not good; neither ammunition nor any hope of help from any source. [f.79r] I was obliged to borrow a thousand *écus* to pay the soldiers who had received nothing for four months. M. de Metellopolis and Sieur Véret proposed that we be given vessels and victuals, and all the Europeans who wished to withdraw from the kingdom of Siam. Opra Phetracha, king, said he was in agreement, provided M. de Metellopolis and Véret remained as guarantors. The peace treaty was thus drawn up: we would leave with drums beating, wicks lit,<sup>73</sup> with arms and baggage, they would provide us with two vessels, victuals, and all the Englishmen

<sup>68</sup> More than 50,000 *livres* according to BN Fr 8210.

<sup>69</sup> Presumably Desfarges; Phaulkon was killed the same evening that Desfarges left Louvo, having said nothing in support of the Greek.

<sup>70</sup> He intended to do this; he had not yet done so.

<sup>71</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> July.

<sup>72</sup> This gesture has been much discussed. Phetracha, who presumably authorized this disbursement, seems to have wished to keep on far better terms with the French Jesuits than with the French Missionaries.

<sup>73</sup> Many texts have this detail; it was presumably to be able to fire the cannons if there were a surprise attack launched by the enemy. But it was part of a symbolic formula which appeared in every treaty determining an honourable capitulation.

in the prisons, together with Moorish<sup>74</sup> crews to navigate the vessels to Pondichéry, where, on arriving, the said vessels would be returned to Siam; and the Jesuits and Missionaries could remain if they so wished in the kingdom, having the same privileges as with the late king; and the godown of the [French] Company would remain with the privileges it had previously obtained; and hostages on both sides would be exchanged to facilitate the departure from the river.

{ 15 } After the conclusion of this treaty, Mme Constance, who was staying in the king's son's residence, was brought into the stronghold of Bangkok. This broke up all the measures [agreed], and as soon as they [the Siamese] knew she was in the stronghold, they seized all the French and Portuguese Missionaries, and a Jesuit Father named La Breuille, who had remained. M. Véret, who was in [the city of] Siam to give orders to have brought [to us] the things needed for our embarkation, was placed in prison with all the relatives of Mme Constance and all the Christians. She remained about three weeks in the stronghold. Her mother wrote a letter to M. Desfarges, [counter-]signed by all the Fathers, requesting him to send her daughter back, and if she were not given up, everything would be lost. Opra Phetracha, king, wrote to M. Desfarges to hand this woman over, since she was not European, but Japanese.<sup>75</sup>

[f.79v] { 16 } I brought the letter which Mme Constance's mother wrote to Monseigneur de Seignelay. We did all that we could to keep her and concluded a second treaty for her, to wit: she was free in the kingdom to live how she chose without anyone troubling her. I only mention this article among others, for here are many circumstances about which I cannot write.<sup>76</sup>

{ 17 } M. de l'Estrille arrived on 20<sup>th</sup> September<sup>77</sup> in the roads of Siam on the *Oriflamme* and with 80 wretched soldiers. I am sure they were not worth 10 (sound) men. He sent [on shore] the second captain, M. Cornuel, Sieur (.....) his lieutenant, with two other officers. They were taken up the river to [the city of] Siam without knowing anything. The Siamese mandarins went on board and were very friendly, saying that the troops were well in Bangkok, that M. Constance had only just departed from the Tabanque.<sup>78</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> of the same month, he [de

<sup>74</sup> Indian Muslim.

<sup>75</sup> She was part-Portuguese, part-Bengali, and part-Japanese in fact. Beauchamp glosses over all the sordid details of the way she was treated by Desfarges and why, and how the two councils of officers called by Desfarges were against surrendering her.

<sup>76</sup> Such as Beauchamp's and Desfarges' retention of many of Mme Constance's jewels, how the imprisonment of the French and Mme Constance's family was a put-up job, along with the letter from her mother.

<sup>77</sup> The texts are infuriatingly vague or contradictory about the arrival of the *Oriflamme*, which obviously changed the situation in favour of the French. Beauchamp himself, in BN Fr 8210, gives the date of 15 August, Le Blanc has about 15 August.

<sup>78</sup> The customs house; this must refer to that at Paknam, not that below Ayutthaya.

l'Estrille] wanted to send his longboat in search of water, but it was taken, and by good luck M. Desfarges had sent an officer to [the city of] Siam to have Sieur Véret make haste, and when the officer wanted to return to Bangkok, he learnt on the river bank that there were officers who had been brought to the residence of the barcalon.<sup>79</sup> He retraced his steps and found M. Cornuel and the other officers who told him that these people had brought them to [the city of] Siam, they thinking they were going to Bangkok, not knowing by what route they had been taken; they returned with the said officer to Bangkok; from them we learnt of the arrival of the *Oriflamme*. I should tell you that I was designated [a temporary] hostage with the Chevalier Desfarges, and the bishop and Véret who [were to remain] were to accompany us to the roads.

{18} When we wished to leave, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, we [f.80r] embarked 28 cannons in two barges, not being able to put them on board the ships because of [the bar at] the mouth of the river. It was stated in the treaty that we, who were hostages, ought to be beside the ships to the rear. We left Bangkok without leaving anything there, according to the clauses [in the treaty]. M. Desfarges embarked last, and when we had gone half-way, some five leagues from Bangkok, the old ambassador<sup>80</sup> who was taking me made me change barges and put ropes (in it). I was alone in this barge, very well armed, with my valet, and suspicious [when] they (took) me up a stream where I did not know (where) I was. At two in the afternoon (I heard) the voice of M. Véret who was with the bishop of Metellopolis, followed by many barges. I shouted to Sieur Véret. M. de Metellopolis, hearing my voice, came up to me and (I) said to him that this was not in accordance with the treaty we had signed. The old ambassador came up to us at that moment, and I called to M. de Metellopolis to speak to the ambassador [and say] this was not in accordance with the treaty we had signed, and I would not (go ahead) if I were not beside the ship. Seeing I was resolved, he took us there, and when I was near, I tied the [rope of the] boat to the thighs of my valet. This precaution was very useful. An hour before daybreak, there came about a hundred barges to take us away and cut the ropes, and they sent the bishop to snatch me from the old ambassador and had him go on board the vessel;<sup>81</sup> and as we had passed the last Tabanque, I said to M. Desfarges that the barge[s] transporting the cannons had been [deliberately] sunk. There were five Frenchmen in each. M. Desfarges was most distressed on hearing this [f.80v] news. He wanted to tie up and go and burn them down (in) the fortified Tabanque, and [burn down] the other (forts) nearby, but he was told that if he did

<sup>79</sup> The *phra khlang*, effectively minister of foreign affairs and trade, at this time Kosa Pan, the former first ambassador to France.

<sup>80</sup> Kanlaya Ratchamaitri.

<sup>81</sup> This is an extremely confused account, and the longer version is even more confused. Knowing Beauchamp's character, one should suspect duplicity.

that, the Moorish crews from Siam would certainly jump overboard and (flee); reflecting on this he found it better to depart. In this manner [we] reached the roads, close to M. [de] l'Estrille, where we dropped anchor.

{19} M. de Metellopolis wrote to M. Desfarges, in which he told (him) to send the most important hostage,<sup>82</sup> and he guaranteed that his cannons would be sent to him. He [Desfarges] replied that these people would deceive him, seeing they were untrustworthy and without [the concept of] honour.<sup>83</sup> M. Desfarges received another letter from the said lord bishop, through the Jesuit Father Thionville, in which he [the bishop] informed him he [Desfarges] (had) effects [belonging to the Siamese] worth more than the cannons, and if they broke their word, he could keep the effects [and so be better off];<sup>84</sup> this made him send [back] the first hostage, but when they had him, they poked fun at us and sent us nothing, which forced us to keep the second hostage<sup>85</sup> and the old ambassador, whom I left at Pondichéry.

{20} M. Desfarges asked M. Véret if he did not (wish) to return to [the city of] Siam. He replied that if he returned, the [French Indies] Company would be ruined, and he had arranged his affairs so that the Company would be satisfied. M. Desfarges asked him [to write] a statement to [confirm] this declaration to acquit him, which he did in Pondichéry.<sup>86</sup>

{21} We set sail on 5<sup>th</sup> November;<sup>87</sup> I was on board the *Oriflamme* with M. Desfarges. The troops were dispersed on four vessels, namely the *Oriflamme*, the *Siam*, and another small frigate, and (also) a ship belonging to the Company.<sup>88</sup>

[f.81r] {22} We arrived in Malacca for the Christmas holidays and stayed there a few days to buy victuals and take on water. M. Véret used all the money [he had] brought on the *Oriflamme* and belonging to the Company on purchasing tin and gold dust.<sup>89</sup> After completing his affairs, we set sail to go to Pondichéry on 10<sup>th</sup> January, where we found M. du Bruant with 15 or 16 soldiers, who had arrived a week before us, and who had withdrawn from Mergui on St John's day,<sup>90</sup> being unable to retain the stronghold which remained (.....) too (.....), and moreover lacking water, on a frigate<sup>91</sup> he had (seized) at the beginning of the revolution. MM

<sup>82</sup> Who was the governor of Ayutthaya.

<sup>83</sup> Coming from Desfarges, that is rather rich.

<sup>84</sup> Again, Beauchamp appears incoherent; perhaps a phrase is missing, so the text should read something like "and Desfarges replied that if they broke their word..."

<sup>85</sup> In BN Fr 8210 we are told he was the governor of the customs post at Paknam.

<sup>86</sup> The words "in Pondichéry" have a line through them.

<sup>87</sup> BN Fr 8210 has 6 November.

<sup>88</sup> The other Siamese vessel was the *Louvo*; the Company vessel appears to have been the *Vérette*.

<sup>89</sup> Veret's accounts (AN Col C/1/26 f.168r-v) show he spent 25,596 *livres* in gold in Malacca, and 24,624 *livres* on tin and tutenag.

<sup>90</sup> 24 June.

<sup>91</sup> A Siamese vessel appropriately called the *Mergui*.



[word deleted] and Chambiche and other officers took part in this withdrawal. M. Hiton, with a good part of his company, was drowned on the longboat which sank to the bottom. They set sail and went to the islands of Tavoy, where they stayed some time with a small English ship which had left [with them] from Mergui. But this ship was seized by a vessel which the mandarin at Mergui had armed to chase after M. du Bruant, but seeing that the said island [sic] was not suitable for obtaining victuals, M. Beauregard,<sup>92</sup> who knew the language of the country, advised M. du Bruant to go and drop anchor in a river which is on the Tavoy coastline, belonging to the King of Pegu.<sup>93</sup> They went there and entered a river where M. de Beauregard, with the Jesuit Father d'Espagnac, went to the town. But they were very (surprised) that on their (arrival) they were told they had to go to Siriam, the capital of the country, to speak to the king, being the custom of this country. He informed M. du Bruant and told him [f.81v] to withdraw, which he did, finding many (obstacles) placed to prevent him from leaving.<sup>94</sup> As for Sieur Beauregard, (he) remained with Father d'Espagnac.<sup>95</sup> M. du Bruant left the said (place) and ran many dangers until he arrived in Bengal, where he found English vessels which seized him, considering [his vessel] as belonging to the King of Siam, and was taken to Madras. Not being able to obtain satisfaction, he moved to Pondichéry, the English retaining 20 of his men and a lieutenant.

{23} We found in Pondichéry four vessels, namely the *Normande*, belonging to His Majesty, commanded by M. de Courcelles, the frigate called the *Saint-Nicholas*, [whose] captain [was M.] (Sailot), and the ketch *Saint-Joseph*, all three coming from Bengal, and the *Coche*, captained by Sieur d'Armagnan, having come from Mergui. As the *Normande* and the *Coche* were (about) to leave for Europe, M. Desfarges (had called together) Sieurs du Bruant, Vertesalle, and the commissioner La Salle, M. de l'Estrille and the director [of Pondichéry] M. Martin, and (.....) to see what should best be done for the Company. M. Desfarges proposed going to take Mergui, but M. du Bruant said it was impossible to retain; it was therefore decided in the council that they would go to take the island of Jonsalan<sup>96</sup> and set up there. M. Desfarges had a review of the troops conducted, and there were 330 men, many of whom were sick, and (40) officers, all land forces. He told me that I had to prepare to leave, as he had selected me to carry the packets [of

<sup>92</sup> Beauregard was another extraordinary person; he was the son of a naval intendant, and came to Siam with the first French embassy. He stayed on, become governor of Bangkok, nearly died in the Makassar revolt, and was then made governor of Mergui after the massacre of the English there. His authority was eclipsed by the arrival of du Bruant in 1688. He was abandoned in Tavoy and died in perpetual slavery.

<sup>93</sup> At this time under Burmese suzerainty.

<sup>94</sup> Stakes were placed in the river and the ship was fired on by cannons.

<sup>95</sup> D'Espagnac suffered the same fate as Beauregard.

<sup>96</sup> Junk Ceylon, modern Phuket.

letters] about the revolution which had occurred in the kingdom of Siam, and told me to tell Monseigneur the Marquis de Seignelay that he would not leave Pondichéry until the vessels [f.82r] which he expected from Europe had arrived at the said outpost of Pondichéry, and would keep M. de l'Estrille with him; he would send a vessel to the Straits of Sunda<sup>97</sup> to prevent vessels from going to Siam.<sup>98</sup> It would be a Siamese vessel which would go there. M. Véret said he had not left goods in Siam which were valuable, and three persons remained to look after what might be [held] there.<sup>99</sup> The Jesuit Fathers are for the late M. de Constance and the Missionaries against. I took down the deposition of the [second] ambassador and the hostage who declared that the (people) who worked in the [Bangkok] stronghold were all Opra Phetracha's men, and he kept 3–4,000 men in the woods around Bangkok, who waited for his orders to come and slit our throats. I asked him if M. Constance knew this; he said no. I asked him if Opra Phetracha knew that M. Desfarges was supposed to go to Louvo, he said yes, and he was waiting for him with 15,000 men in the pagodas and forests. I carried [to Europe] these depositions. M. [de] La Salle, the commissioner, and M. Ferreux,<sup>100</sup> Missionary, and François,<sup>101</sup> the interpreter, were present. M. Ferreux spoke Siamese as well as he. I left him in Pondichéry with M. de Lionne and his Missionaries who crossed over with us.

{24} I embarked on 17<sup>th</sup> February on the *Normande*. M. Desfarges had given a letter to give to the vessels to be found at the Cape [of Good Hope]. We had learnt nothing of the war<sup>102</sup> and had not heard about the vessel the *Lonray*. I hope it arrived safely, and it did as far as I know.

{25} As for Pondichéry they worked non-stop to complete a good wall six feet wide and high with four (good) towers, there being [f.82v] a man on behalf of the [local] prince to advance the works. They should have completed it in a short time. I was to return if Monseigneur the Marquis de Seignelay thought it appropriate and M. Desfarges wrote to him that if he sent troops, to let me see them [first]. As for the establishment of Jonsalan, M. Desfarges had only done it to please Monseigneur the Marquis de Seignelay.

<sup>97</sup> Between Sumatra and Java, the route used to reach Siam from the Cape.

<sup>98</sup> This was not apparently done.

<sup>99</sup> However, Véret's accounts indicate (AN Col C/1/26 f.169r) that there remained in the stores, according to the inventory drawn up the day before leaving (therefore on 1 November?) not including five chests of coral which remained and which had not been valued, there being no receipt, goods to the value of 23,333 *livres*, a not inconsiderable sum. The three men were of course arrested by the Siamese, since Véret had gone off with the French troops.

<sup>100</sup> Pierre Ferreux served in Ayutthaya from 1686, and after leaving with the French troops in November 1688, chose to return at the end of 1689 with the Siamese hostages, remaining here until his death in 1698.

<sup>101</sup> François was the son of Vicente Pinheiro; both were interpreters attached to the French Missionaries (cf Launay, *Documents Historiques* 1920 II: 607).

<sup>102</sup> The War of the Grand Alliance, 1689–1697.

{26} We arrived on 26<sup>th</sup> April at the Cape of Good Hope<sup>103</sup> where we were attacked, and between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May the *Coche* arrived at five in the [after]noon and was taken in the night after having been fired on by four vessels. The captain was killed, [the crew] were searched and taken into the fortress, and two months later, the governor stripped us down to our shirts and had us embark on (.....)<sup>104</sup> vessels, and we left on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

{27} I should tell you that they sent nearly 80 men to Batavia,<sup>105</sup> not one of whom wished to go there.

{28} We arrived in Middelburg on 29<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>106</sup> We were placed in prisons with [an allowance of] 4 (*sous*) a day. I earnestly request you, Sir, kindly to do what you can to extract me from such a vile place as this.<sup>107</sup>

{29} I request you to show this to Monseigneur the Marquis de Seignelay since my letters are intercepted. If M. Allard who has been here (.....) had the time to remain here, I would have sent as much to Monsiegnur. There are many things I cannot write about. When I have the honour to see him, I shall relate them to him.

From the prisons of Middelburg, this 17<sup>th</sup> November 1689.

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<sup>103</sup> BN Fr 8210 has 27 April, and 5 May for the arrival of the *Coche*.

<sup>104</sup> Le Blanc says four.

<sup>105</sup> Le Blanc says about 100.

<sup>106</sup> BN Fr 8210 has 1 November.

<sup>107</sup> Le Blanc says the French stayed in prison for more than four months, so it seems that an exchange of prisoners could not have taken place before March 1690.

## Unpublished letter from Jean Vollant des Verquains, engineer From Middelburg, 17 November 1689

### Introduction

In contrast to the life of Desfarges, which was brief after his departure from Pondichéry in February 1690, we know a good deal more about Vollant des Verquains, who lived much longer.<sup>1</sup> His father was a Lille architect and notable, who oversaw the construction of fortifications designed by Vauban of numerous towns in the north, and, after the return to Lille to French territory in 1667, undertook the grandiose Paris gate there. He was praised by the difficult minister Louvois, Under-Secretary of State charged with the supervision of buildings and construction, and was brought to Versailles to advise on how to bring water to the new palace. He became grand treasurer of Lille in 1671, and in 1685 he and his descendants were granted letters of nobility. His son Jean, born about 1658, was his most famous offspring. He appears to have gone to Rome in 1673 as an architect, and in 1679 was an engineer in the king's armies, working with his father on the fortifications of Menin and the Canal de Maintenon bringing water to Versailles. He acquired the lordship of the manor of Werquains and was subsequently appointed in February 1687 with three other engineers (Brissay, de Langres and Plantier) to go to Siam. He seems to have spent at least four months in prison in the Netherlands, after being taken captive along with all those on board the *Normande* and the *Coche* at the Cape in 1689, and was released in an exchange of prisoners some time after February 1690. By December 1690 he had sufficiently recovered to buy the rights of burger of Lille and marry the daughter of a rich Cambrai family. He succeeded his father as grand treasurer of Lille in 1694 and was granted the title of knight in 1699 by Louis XIV, becoming at the same time counsellor to the king. Among the structures he designed in Lille is the Pont Neuf. He died in 1729.

In short, he was not a nobody and had all the right connections. One can see that he had reason to resent the cupidity and stupidity of Desfarges, who was in overall command of French troops and engineers in Siam. Vollant naturally dismissed the work of La Mare, a gifted amateur, who had stayed on in Siam in 1685 and drawn up, and partially implemented, plans for the fortifications of various Siamese cities. Vollant must have been somewhat overworked, because

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks above all to the volume by R. Quarre-Reybourbon, *La Porte de Paris à Lille et Simon Vollant, son Architecte* (Paris, Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1891), unearthed by M. Bernard Suisse, to whom all my gratitude. The information here is taken from this book, pp.16–23.

Plantier died before or shortly after reaching Siam and Brissay died in Lopburi from ill-treatment soon after the coup of May 1688; it is true though that the surviving engineer de Langres complained of the airs Vollant gave himself.<sup>2</sup> Céberet, in his account of his mission of 1687, noted that Vollant was “furiously aggrieved” with Desfarges at one stage, and had to recommend caution and patience.<sup>3</sup> Martin though makes the clearest statement indicating that Desfarges sent Vollant back to France in disgrace in 1689, along with the would-be liberator of Mme Phaulkon, Sainte-Marie, who was to be kept under guard.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Vollant had a few pleasant material souvenirs: Houdoy, in *Tapisserie de haute lisse*,<sup>5</sup> notes that he “had brought back from the Far East a mass of ‘curiosities’, Chinese lacquer, porcelain, and pots, which decorated his house.”

His hitherto unpublished letter which follows, written from prison in the Netherlands, discretely glosses over the more sordid aspects of Desfarges’ treatment of Mme Phaulkon, though in his published account, which appeared in Lille in 1691, the year following his release from Middelburg, the general is not spared. He possibly had learnt of Desfarges’ death which occurred some time in 1690. But there was most probably a more practical reason for this omission and that of an account of the departure from Bangkok, the journey to Pondichéry, the capture of the French ships at the Cape, and the journey to the Netherlands as a prisoner: he was writing against time, and perhaps running out of paper and ink as well. It should be noted that Beauchamp’s long letter, destined to be placed in Seignelay’s hands, from Middelburg is also dated 17 November 1689; clearly both were given the opportunity of writing to France which they seized.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Jacq-Hergoualc’h, *L’Europe et le Siam du XVIe au XVIII siècle: Apports culturels*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1993, pp. 207–213.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Smithies, *Mission made Impossible: The second French embassy to Siam 1687*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm, 2002, pp. 176–7.

<sup>4</sup> “Sieur de Sainte-Marie, he who had brought Mme Phaulkon from Siam [Ayutthaya] to Bangkok and whom the general dismissed, as well as Sieur Vollant, engineer, though he had attestations to the contrary from other officers and it is also certain that passion entered into this dismissal.” Martin, *Mémoires*, 1934 III, p. 30, quoted in M. Smithies, *A Resounding Failure: Martin and the French in Siam 1672–1693*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm, 1998, pp. 113–4.

<sup>5</sup> Lille, 1871, p. 93, cited in Quarre-Reybourbon.



**Letter**  
**Archives Nationales, Paris : AN Col. C/1/25 ff.84r–90v<sup>6</sup>**

[f.84r] Sieur Volland in Middelburg, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1689

{1} I thought Your Lordship<sup>7</sup> would not be displeased if I had the honour to provide him with some small details of the chief circumstances concerning the revolution in Siam. I have devoted every care to do this in the most balanced way as possible, being more disinterested (in this) than anyone in the world, and (championing) no other cause than the truth. This is why I implore you very humbly, Monseigneur, to grant me the honour of receiving it as coming from a person quite unable to (deviate) from the rigorousness with which one is required (to write) to a person such as Your Lordship.

{2} As soon as our vessels had left Siam,<sup>8</sup> M. Constance<sup>9</sup> came to Bangkok,<sup>10</sup> where he ordered what he desired relating to the fort, but on which work only began on 1<sup>st</sup> February, given that M. Desfarges<sup>11</sup> had gone to Louvo,<sup>12</sup> from whence he only returned a fortnight later. He desired to be present when the work was begun, the rest of the month being employed in constructing bamboo billets for the soldiers, so that we should only count as (having) worked for (three) and a half months, during which time we transported 4,572 cubic *toises*,<sup>13</sup> although a man only transports on each trip [a little] over one (hundred) of cubic feet, but the care we took to urge them on resulted in our having moved this quantity of (wood).

{3} Shortly after, Sieur Constance sent Sieur du Bruant to Mergui.<sup>14</sup> He had scarcely gone than Sieur Constance observed that Opra Phetracha, an important mandarin in the kingdom, began to plot and organized for himself a faction,

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<sup>6</sup> There are only four paragraphs in the original; we have constituted others for ease of reading.

<sup>7</sup> The title given is “Votre Grandeur”. It is not known for certain to whom this letter was addressed, but it seems most likely that it was the Marquis de Seignelay, Secretary of State for the Navy, in charge of the Siamese venture. Seignelay died in 1690, and Volland’s published account was dedicated to Dreux-Louis Dugné de Bagnols, a Lille notable, counsellor of state and administrator of the king’s armies in Flanders.

<sup>8</sup> The chief French envoy, La Loubère, left Siam on 2 January 1688 (according to Volland, 1691) to return to France with the vessels which had brought his embassy and troops to Siam.

<sup>9</sup> Phaulkon, in effect, without the title, minister of foreign affairs and trade.

<sup>10</sup> Where the bulk of the French garrison was stationed since October the previous year.

<sup>11</sup> The general in charge of French forces in Siam.

<sup>12</sup> Lopburi.

<sup>13</sup> A toise was approximately 6 feet (a linear fathom).

<sup>14</sup> Du Bruant left on 3 February, according to Le Blanc, with three companies of troops for the outpost of Mergui on the Bay of Bengal, then Siamese territory. They arrived there on 27 March and were forced to abandon the place on 24 June (28 June according to La Touche). We hear no more about them in this account.

imperceptibly drawing the chief mandarins into his interests, but not disclosing to them his [f.84v] aim, which was to place the crown on his head. This man was [as] much liked by the talapoins, who are the priests of the country, as by the people. He began with (the) former, and disguised his intentions with the pious (pretext) of supporting the pagodas, that is the religion, in all its purity, [it] having been assailed greatly by the excessive indulgence of the king, who had permitted a public [Catholic] Mission and had given the freedom to all his subjects to become Christians, which (tended towards) the complete destruction of the pagodas. As for the mandarins he sought to win over, he gave them to understand that it was of the utmost importance to the State to divert the pernicious plans which M. Constance had formed against the kingdom by bringing the French there and making them the masters of the two chief outposts; [he said] that the king was a good ruler who did not investigate closely the consequences which could result from the readiness to introduce foreigners, who would perhaps in time become the masters of the place; [and] that they were thus obliged, as zealous defenders of their freedom, to join with him to liberate themselves from a form of slavery into which [t]he[y] would inevitably sink if the king who succeeded to the throne had the same facility of complying with the conduct of M. Constance, who had to be removed. These words appeared very fine, and there was not one who did not enter blindly to embrace them, so it was not long before he had won over many mandarins to his faction, even to those who were (extremely) devoted to the king's person.

{4} However, this great enterprise could not be conducted in such secrecy [f.84r *repeated*] that it did not come to the knowledge of M. Constance through several mandarins, whom interest and fine hopes could not deflect from his faction, and he considered for his part on the means of forestalling Phetracha's enterprise, whose intentions he fathomed better than anyone, but he needed more convincing (proof) than words to denounce him to the king, the custom in that kingdom being to punish a [false] accuser with the same chastisement which the accused would have suffered if he had been convicted. Moreover he feared that the threats of Phetracha might so strongly intimidate those who had revealed this secret to him that they would not [give their] support with sufficient vigour as such an enterprise required. But by (good fortune), a few days later, he received from the governor of the city of Siam<sup>15</sup> a counterfeit order from the king bearing his seals, [written] by Phetracha, in which he ordered him to hand over a quantity of weaponry. In addition, he received (another) a few (days) afterwards from Pipely,<sup>16</sup> of the same purport as the other, in which he ordered him to have ready a number of armed men prepared to set off as soon as the order was received. This was already

<sup>15</sup> Ayutthaya.

<sup>16</sup> Phetchaburi.

more than was needed for M. Constance to convince the king of the evil intentions of the plotter, and to have him punished as he deserved; but as he received (daily) news about the mandarins whom Phetracha added to his faction, he thought it was rash [to] commit the authority of the king to have him arrested in a place where he (could) have people ready to support his interests. This was why he thought it would be safer to have some French troops and officers, and to this end he [f.84v repeated] informed M. Desfarges that he had a matter of the utmost importance to the two crowns to communicate to him, and he requested that he come immediately to Louvo.

{5} The general went there, he [Phaulkon] told him he learnt from all sides that Phetracha was constituting his faction, and that he did not doubt he was intending to seize the kingdom and destroy the Christian religion and the interests of the king our master, and that, to forestall such an enterprise, it was expedient that he came up to Louvo with eighty of his best men and several officers, in order to arrest him without any risk; and finally that M. Desfarges should not heed the false rumours which Phetracha bruited about the kingdom concerning the death of the king, with the intention of alarming us and observing our (proceedings). M. Constance arranged (for him) to have an audience with the king the same day as he left Louvo to return to Bangkok, where, as soon as he arrived, he put the whole garrison under arms, and having selected eighty of his best men, he left the next day in several *mirous*.<sup>17</sup>

{6} He had hardly arrived in [the city of] Siam<sup>18</sup> than he went to the French godown,<sup>19</sup> where Sieur Véret,<sup>20</sup> head of the said godown, and long a sworn enemy of M. Constance, decided to do everything in his power to satisfy his desires and to destroy him, as when he gave M. Desfarges to understand he risked much both for himself and his troops to undertake going to Louvo, as the rumour had it that the king was dead, and [he related] many other things which would take too long to enumerate. Our general, although he (must) have been fully persuaded about the king of Siam's health<sup>21</sup> and the (necessity) [f.85r] of supporting the plans of M. Constance, which only concerned the well-being of his master and the interests of His Majesty,<sup>22</sup> did not fail to endorse the views of Sieur Véret, without reflecting

<sup>17</sup> Small country or river boats; the plural is often *miroux*.

<sup>18</sup> On 15 April, according to Le Blanc.

<sup>19</sup> The offices or "factory" of the French East Indies Company.

<sup>20</sup> All the references to Véret in the original letter are underlined. An arrest order for Véret was issued his malversation of Company funds, and it seems likely that the different accounts arriving in France were used, possibly by some police agency, to gather material on Véret's conduct of affairs.

<sup>21</sup> Since he had had an audience with him only five days previously, as Laneau points out below.

<sup>22</sup> Respectively King Narai and Louis XIV.



that he had [no] aim but of causing the downfall of M. Constance, and of profiting of this turn of events to take possession of all the goods in the godown, on the pretext that everything would have been pillaged, as events turned out to be all too true, being entirely unable to justify himself before the director of the godown at Pondichéry,<sup>23</sup> claiming that all the papers in the establishment has been pilfered, which was untrue. This man, seeing he had partly won over M. Desfarges, thought it meet to take him to the seminary, so that there could be completed what he had so well begun, well knowing that the bishops<sup>24</sup> had no other views than those he had [already] given them. M. de Lionne was the first who asked M. Desfarges how he dared to leave himself open to having his throat cut along with all those who had come with him, as all the kingdom was under arms following the death of the king which had been announced a long time before. “I advise you,” he said, “to return to Bangkok as quickly as you can”; but the old Bishop of Metellopolis, a virtuous and pious man, said that one should not grant credence so readily to rumours, and it was appropriate, before giving up, to (know) the truth, and there was reason to doubt that the king of Siam was dead, [since] the general had had an audience with him hardly five days previously, and the rumour dated from that time; to be better reassured, it was necessary [f.85v] to write to M. Constance and inform him of what he had learnt in [the city of] Siam. M. Desfarges was not unaware that he was alive, and this rumour was not an (unexpected) matter for him, since M. Constance had warned him about this, and had requested him several times [to beware of this rumour], when outlining his plan, to the point where he [Desfarges] had began to be annoyed, so often did he [Constance] repeat himself. So it was decided that an officer would be sent to M. Constance, as much to know if the roads were guarded by a very large number of armed men, as Sieur Véret most positively assured him, as to warn M. Constance that this news had been received, and that, during this period [while the officer was absent] M. Desfarges would depart from Siam to set up his command two leagues below that city.

{7} Lieutenant Le Roy<sup>25</sup> was selected to carry the letter and having taken all the precautions of someone who did not wish to be surprised, he was very astonished to see that they were all pointless, and that all he met with on the way were elephants, horses, barges, and palanquins which M. Constance had sent half-way between [the city of] Siam and Louvo to receive M. Desfarges and his troops. As soon as he arrived in Louvo, he thought everyone had been murdered, so great was the silence and (tranquillity). He went first of all to the house of the Jesuit Fathers, where M. Constance was just leaving with his lady, and where he had observed that

<sup>23</sup> The scrupulously honest François Martin.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Laneau, Bishop of Metellopolis, and Artus de Lionne, Bishop of Rosalie.

<sup>25</sup> Le Roy is not named in Vollant’s published text.

evening a lunar eclipse.<sup>26</sup> As soon as he knew that a French officer had come from M. Desfarges, he left his chamber, received the letter which this officer carried, and who had even taken the precaution of concealing it in the knot of his wig. M. Constance replied immediately to M. Desfarges, and requested him with good reason not to give in to [f.86r] these fears, and [saying] that he ought to be sufficiently persuaded to the contrary; in addition to that, the person carrying the letter could (also) confirm the extreme tranquility in which everyone rested. Sieur Le Roy having received his reply, returned to Siam without seeing any more troops than when he went up.

{8} As it was appropriate to be informed of everything, Lieutenant (d'Anglas) was sent to buy victuals for the troops, with orders to observe if he saw any signs of disturbance in the town. This officer, having in one afternoon gone about all the (quarters) of [the city of] Siam, related that everything was (extremely) quiet. It seemed that all these signs, so contrary (to the rumour) which prevailed, should have dispelled every fear in M. Desfarges, and caused him to carry out his promise, but he was too predisposed and had already decided on his course of action. He resolved before leaving to send Sieur Dacieux, an old captain, (to) M. Constance with a letter in which he indicated that he could not go up to Louvo nor leave his stronghold without risking losing his head [when] in France, and if he wished to come to Bangkok, he would receive him with pleasure. This officer, who for some time enjoyed the confidence of M. Desfarges, told him that he did not think it was in the interests of the king to abandon M. Constance, particularly in such circumstances as these, where a decisive move was taking place; and moreover he was sufficiently (informed) about the falsity of the rumours which were current not to apprehend going up, but the only reply he (obtained) from this general was that he could not agree to do so, and had given his word to the bishops, who, being persons of merit, (ought to be) heard, and who had agreed to exonerate him (in respect of) the court.<sup>27</sup>

{9} Following this, he left to return to Bangkok, and Sieur Dacieux went to complete his commission in Louvo, where he arrived without coming across any more obstacles [f.86v] on his way than the first officer who had gone there. After handing over his letter, he gave M. Constance a report on the meeting he had had with our general on his account, which greatly surprised him, and forced him to say

<sup>26</sup> This detail also appears in the 1691 text; de Bèze says it took place on Maundy Thursday, the night of 15–16 April.

<sup>27</sup> This seems more like an invention of either Desfarges or of Vollant, than anything proposed by the bishops, who were largely without influence at Versailles. However, the convoluted explanations of the Abbé de Lionne, “Mémoire sur une affaire sur laquelle on m’a demandé quelques éclaircissements” (Launay, *Documents Historiques*, 1920: 208–214), of his conduct in this matter lead one to think that Desfarges was not without justification in believing this to be true.

that he did not think he had given the general cause to abandon him, since it was their common cause that he (espoused), and that an (action) similar to this not being followed up, it (would destroy) the king of Siam, the interests of His Majesty, and his own person in a succession of misfortunes from which [one] would never be able to recover, as the end only too well showed.

{10} On retiring to his chapel to place everything in the hands of Our Lord, he sent back Sieur Dacieux with Sieur de Beauchamp to show once more to M. Desfarges that there was still time to repair the damage, and it was of the utmost importance for the well-being of the two crowns that he came up, for otherwise he must expect everything to be lost. Sieur de Beauchamp assured him many times that there was no danger, and that if he wished to go up, he (would save) everything while risking nothing, but all these reasons, although coming from a man in whom he had every confidence, were (not able to prevail) over the hopes which the bishops had given him, to exonerate him (before) the court, nor to prevent him totally abandoning M. Constance to his tragic fate which is what subsequently happened.

{11} This minister,<sup>28</sup> having lost all hope from those from whom he should most have expected it, and seeing that the conspiracy was gaining ground daily, only thought of warning [f.87r] the king of everything which had occurred, and having found a moment when he was not surrounded by the (creatures) of Phetracha, he informed him of the state of his kingdom, and to forestall such a misfortune, [said] it was best not to explode [in rage] and, with the pretext of infirmity, to declare his daughter queen, and the uncle she chose to marry would succeed him (and) ascend to the throne after having paid respects to his remains for (one) year. The king greatly approved this advice, and having declared his views publicly, Phetracha sought strongly to negate the implementation of this declaration. The king asked (a few days) later of M. Constance where the French were, and how could the general abandon him in such pressing need, whom he had always thought of as his intimate friend, but he was sufficiently gracious to excuse him, not daring to inform the king that he had abandoned him (as well).<sup>29</sup>

{12} Some time after, he [Phaulkon] learnt that the king was (arrested) in his palace, and abandoned by all the mandarins who were won over by Phetracha, and that this rebel was (born) a talapoin, and had introduced a prodigious quantity of armed men there. He resolved to make a final effort to save his master or to die with him, and after bidding farewell to Mme Constance, he went to the palace<sup>30</sup> with some hope of yet finding some support for his ruler, who, being aided by

<sup>28</sup> Meaning Phaulkon, though in fact he never held any office; only the French claimed he was a minister, sometimes even chief minister.

<sup>29</sup> The 1691 text is more direct and invents King Narai's comments on Desfarges' desertion of him.

<sup>30</sup> On 19 May according to the 1691 text; but Vollant has the dispute between Phetracha and Mom Pit taking place on 18 May. Le Blanc and Beauchamp have the coup taking place on 18 May.

some Englishmen and Portuguese and two Siamese companies of dubious loyalty, with the intention of counterbalancing Phetracha who had put himself in control. But he had hardly passed into [f.87v] the second courtyard than he was arrested [by Phetracha] himself, in the presence of Sieurs de Beauchamp, Fretteville, and the Chevalier Desfarges, all three each armed with a couple of pistols and a good sword.<sup>31</sup> After making him go around on the palace walls, he was locked in a prison, from whence he was never seen again. He was made to suffer for more than three weeks every barbarous villainy of the most horrible kind to confess things he had never even thought of, and to force him to declare himself guilty of crimes he had never committed. He [Phetracha] had him taken to a place near Louvo, where, after protesting before God that he had never had any desire other than to serve his master and the State, he (had) his head separated from his body and then was sliced through the middle in the manner of Siamese criminals. This was the tragic end of a man for whom it would have been more honorable to the king that we should perish than abandon him in the manner of cowards, as we did.

{ 13 } Phetracha had convinced Monpit,<sup>32</sup> the adopted son of the king, that he would marry the princess[-queen],<sup>33</sup> and he was only working towards putting him on the throne, having no other desire than to make himself a talapoin and to remove the king's brothers from the succession, for reasons it would take too long to go into. [Monpit] realized, too late, he had been duped, and decided to go and throw himself at the king's feet and reveal all the intrigues of Phetracha, seeking his pardon for having been so base as to follow and listen to him. The king, who favoured him, readily pardoned him, but his enemy [f.88r] who saw in this all his plot revealed, and (absolutely) in the necessity of unmasking himself, was not so indulgent for him, and (watched) for the moment when the king left his chamber, which Monpit did not leave after making his confession. Phetracha was rewarded after two days, and having removed him by force, had him assassinated in the antechamber and then displayed at the palace gate. This Phetracha, having thus disposed of these two (persons) who could upset his plan, if they had remained united, only thought of doing the same thing with the king's two brothers,<sup>34</sup> who were two powerful obstacles to his plan to ascend the throne. But as it would require too many details to indicate all the stratagems he employed to make himself master of these two princes, I shall merely say that both being in the palace in [the city of] Siam, he found the means of extracting the elder<sup>35</sup> with fine hopes of

<sup>31</sup> Vollant implies they did not seize the opportunity to remove Phetracha; Beauchamp (whose bluster was greater than his valour) maintains they were waiting for a signal from Phaulkon.

<sup>32</sup> The name is variously given in the texts as Pi, Ophra Pi, etc. He was the son of a low-ranking courtier.

<sup>33</sup> Krom Luang Yothathep, Narai's only child.

<sup>34</sup> Chao Fa Apaithot, the elder, and Chao Fa Noi.

succeeding the king, going as far as performing the *zombaye*,<sup>36</sup> acknowledging him as his master. This prince, dazzled by the desire to reign, readily fell into the trap, and on arriving in Louvo, he [Phetracha] forced the younger to leave the palace, and seeing himself master of both unfortunate princes, he invented crimes [they had committed] against the king and the State, particularly the elder, of having received homage due only to the king during his lifetime, and so on his authority had them killed in the manner of [disposing] of Siamese princes, whose blood it is not permitted to shed, but had them placed in a sack of [f.88v] scarlet velvet, in which they are beaten with the most precious wood of the Indies, sandalwood.<sup>37</sup>

{ 14 } Phetracha, having thus reached the (peak) of his (ambition), did not hesitate to declare himself king,<sup>38</sup> there being no obstacle left to him, the mandarins perceiving his intentions only little by little as he [hatched and] revealed them, and (they saw) in the end that they had been duped by his ambition.

{ 15 } I think it would now be appropriate to return to Bangkok where we left M. Desfarges on having returned from [the city of] Siam. [He] had scarcely arrived than he pretended to be sick in order to have an excuse not to go up to Louvo and to cut short all the pressing (requests) that M. Constance sent to him, both through the Jesuit Fathers Le Royer and Le Blanc,<sup>39</sup> who came on purpose for that, and Sieurs Dacieux and de Beauchamp, who came to rectify the course of action he had taken.

{ 16 } From that time, our workmen were considerably reduced in number, and seeing [that] the misfortune of M. Constance would increase ours, [I] suggested to M. Desfarges making a retrenchment in the stronghold and mining the cavalier<sup>40</sup> on the western fort, since it overlooked us in the stronghold. M. Desfarges did not want (.....) to listen to this, saying that, apart from it not being the custom in Siam to demolish a structure built on the king's orders, Phetracha could take this as an aggression and a declaration of war, and that being on friendly terms he did not put himself out in making a favourable (.....) with him. But he saw clearly later that he was deceived in his expectations, for when he saw him completely in charge in the palace, which occurred at the end of April,<sup>41</sup> he [Phetracha] sent for him through

<sup>35</sup> This error is corrected in the 1691 text to the younger; the elder was well-known to be incapable.

<sup>36</sup> Formal prostration, kow-tow.

<sup>37</sup> This was done, according to the 1691 text, on 19 July, probably a mistake for 9 July, since Narai's half-brothers according to Vollant himself were killed before the death of the king.

<sup>38</sup> Curiously Vollant has so far made no mention of King Narai's death; the 1691 text gives the date 11 July.

<sup>39</sup> Both had arrived in Siam the previous year, part of a group that Phaulkon had procured through the intermediary of the Jesuit Tachard.

<sup>40</sup> An observation tower.

the first ambassador to France,<sup>42</sup> together with M. de Lionne [f.89r] and M. Véret, after having arrested all the French officers to be found in Louvo, saying that it was necessary for the king's service that he came up, although there was much greater risk for his person in this journey than when M. Constance requested the same thing of him, when he had a greater escort.<sup>43</sup> He [Desfarges] allowed himself to follow the first ambassador, after holding a council about this, ever hoping to come to an understanding with Phetracha, as M. de Lionne had given him hopes, but found this was far from the case. When he arrived in Louvo, he was confronted by a man who only uttered threats, assuming an absolute air as if he were his overlord. He began by asking three things: why he had gone to [the city of] Siam with his troops; why he had returned [to Bangkok] without going up to Louvo; and why M. Constance had brought Frenchmen into the kingdom. M. Desfarges replied to all these questions; [his answers] would take too long to detail here.<sup>44</sup> Phetracha then said to him that as he had come to Siam to serve the king, it was appropriate to his service that he came up with all his troops to march against the (Laos), the king's enemies, and if he refused to give his word for that, he should not count on returning to Bangkok. M. Desfarges promised him anything in order to return to his stronghold, even leaving his two sons as hostages.<sup>45</sup>

{ 17 } On arriving in Bangkok, he found his stronghold in good order, and many of the cannons in position, although he had forbidden M. de Vertesalle and me to do anything which might give the Siamese grounds for suspicion during his absence. The same day he returned, 6<sup>th</sup> June, after dinner<sup>46</sup> we [f.89v] made the open declaration of war, by (firing on) one of the king's vessels which passed in front of the stronghold and which refused to give us salt in return for our money. After that, thought was given to withdrawing all the munitions in the western fort, and about this M. Desfarges asked me if I could mine it in time for the next morning. I said there was no time, and the mines to bring down such a structure could not complete their task in the fifteen hours he desired; that if I had been listened to [earlier], this would already have been done. So we made do with disabling the cannons which brought down a part of the parapets. The troops moved over to the east [fort] and the Siamese put themselves in control of that to the west; [we were] unable to retain both of them because we had so few men. They constructed a wooden cavalier on top of the (masonry) one in order better to observe our strong-

<sup>41</sup> This seems to be an error for May; Le Blanc says he left Bangkok on 31 May.

<sup>42</sup> Kosa Pan, Ok-phra Wisuth Sunthorn.

<sup>43</sup> Vollant does not mention the bait given by Kosa Pan: that Desfarges would take over the offices of Phaulkon and would instruct his eldest son the Marquis Desfarges in his carrying out his duties.

<sup>44</sup> They appear in the 1691 text.

<sup>45</sup> Desfarges left Lopburi on 5 June according to the 1691 text, the same day Phaulkon was killed.

<sup>46</sup> Dinner was eaten in the early afternoon in the seventeenth century.

hold, but were never able to use it, being obliged to underpin it before it was even finished. We fired for three days running from six cannons, and a fortnight passed without any talk of coming to terms, at the end of which the Siamese made the first moves, and gave us to understand through the Bishop of Metellopolis that they were willing to consider some settlement. That was followed by several letters dispatched on both sides, the contents of which I shall pass over as well as the details of the treaties. Whilst we were deliberating, the Siamese did not desist in constructing around our stronghold, at the distance of a musket shot, [f.90r] nine redoubts,<sup>47</sup> the smallest of which contained six cannons, and when we desired to use our cannons to stop them working, M. Desfarges forbade us, considering it inappropriate to expend our powder on that, though it could not have been put to better use. We were on the point of lacking victuals when a settlement seemed close, for our stock of meat was almost exhausted, and wood began to run short in the stronghold. This forced our general to ask that the market be allowed to be set up by our fortress,<sup>48</sup> and finally, after many propositions and proposals, they granted [us] two vessels for which Sieur Véret was to remain as caution, who however returned with us.<sup>49</sup>

{18} About three weeks before our departure, Sieur de Larre,<sup>50</sup> formerly a ship's captain, brought Mme Constance to Bangkok,<sup>51</sup> who had found the means of escaping from the hands of her persecutors and those who were to lock her up in the palace,<sup>52</sup> there to be prostituted. M. Desfarges was very angry, for he saw this as a great obstacle to his departure, which he had long desired; moreover he was not unaware that in keeping her, he would be obliged to return a certain deposit about which I do not think I should speak and in which everyone had had a hand.<sup>53</sup> The poor lady intended to say nothing about this if she had been kept and liberated from the sad slavery to which she was reduced, but in spite of a council in which nearly every person was for keeping her, she saw she was to be returned to the hands of her persecutors. This is [f.90v] what she could not endure, (seeing she) had two of the most obliging letters that one could receive from the king,<sup>54</sup> (which) forced her to say publicly that they were not satisfied in looting her, but, in spite of

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<sup>47</sup> Outworks.

<sup>48</sup> War was still conducted in a gentlemanly fashion: the French were allowed to buy foodstuffs from the Siamese peasants outside the fort.

<sup>49</sup> There is no mention here of Laneau, Bishop Metellopolis, also remaining as guarantor.

<sup>50</sup> This appears to be the original name of M. de Sainte-Marie; the 1681 text talks of de Larre *or* Sainte Marie.

<sup>51</sup> On 4 October according to the 1691 text.

<sup>52</sup> Of Phetracha's son Sorasak.

<sup>53</sup> This is a veiled reference to Mme Phaulkon's jewels which Desfarges had appropriated; Vollant was much less reticent about this shameful incident in his published account.

<sup>54</sup> Louis XIV.

the king's word, they were selling her, as they had sold her husband. I shall have, Monseigneur, almost as much to say on this count than could appear in the rest of my letter, but the Jesuits, who are trustworthy and far better informed than me about the truth of this matter, will be able to give Your Lordship fuller details. Moreover I would fear, in telling the truth, of being suspect, having as little cause as I have to praise the manner in which M. Desfarges treated me since my departure from France, and of profiting by my emoluments, of which I have not received a single cent<sup>55</sup> other than the six months advance I received from M. [de] La Loubère in Paris. All that I ask of you, Monsiegnur, is not to condemn me without hearing me, and to remind you of all the (vexations) I have experienced since my departure from France, as well as the misery to which we have been reduced for more than seven months.<sup>56</sup>

This is the favour I dare hope for from your indulgence.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Desfarges' rapaciousness apparently knew few bounds.

<sup>56</sup> At the end of the 1691 text, Vollant notes that the French "were detained [in prison] for more than four months." They reached Zeeland, according to Le Blanc, on 28 October 1698 and so could not have been exchanged before March 1690.

<sup>57</sup> The end of this letter is rushed, and leaves out many details included in the 1691 text: the departure from Bangkok, the journey to Pondichéry, the capture of the French ships at the Cape, the journey to the Netherlands. Probably Vollant ran out of paper or time; he seized the opportunity of writing to France when it was presented, as did his fellow-prisoner Beauchamp, on the same day.



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