

DESCRIPTION OF SIAM IN 1829

Barthélemy Bruguière

**Translated and edited by Kennon Breazeale
and Michael Smithies**

The 1829 description of the Thai kingdom and its people was completed after Bruguière had lived in Bangkok for two years, and was sent in the form of a very long letter to the Vicar-General of Aire in his home region in the southwest of France. Bruguière composed it as a book-length work about the country, with attention to geography, natural history, the people (appearance, clothing, customs, occupations, food), religious beliefs and practices, court etiquette, the armed forces and a few remarks on the laws, legal system and sciences. This letter appears in a new English translation below.

The French text was published in 1831 in the missionary journal, the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, issued every two months in Lyon. The following year, a shortened version of the text appeared in the *Nouvelles annales des voyages*, a French geographical journal published in Paris. The Paris version is extensively truncated (about half of the text is omitted altogether), and some passages have been condensed by rephrasing. It also contains a few observations added by the Paris editors that do not appear in Bruguière's text. In particular, the editors in Paris omitted references to the French missions in Siam and elsewhere, and also nearly all of the section on religious beliefs and practices. They probably considered this section, which is tainted by the strong religious prejudices of the time, to be of little value to their more scientific-minded readers, and they may also have been obliged to truncate the text to fit the space available in the journal. This section has been retained in the present translation, in spite of its unpleasant character, because it helps to document the attitudes and misconceptions of the missionaries—even very scholarly ones such as Bruguière—who were, unsurprisingly, never very successful in proselytising. The section also contains some details that may be of value to folklorists and ethnographers.

The text was translated into English and published in 1844 in *The Chinese Repository* in Canton. The anonymous translator was apparently William Dean, a Baptist among the first American missionaries in Thailand, who worked in Bangkok from 1835, became very knowledgeable about the Thai people and moved to Canton in 1842. He made numerous editorial comments, judging Bruguière's work to be valuable, in spite of its shortcomings, misinformed assertions and intolerant opinions about the Thai and their religion:

On the whole, these pages, though at times giving a wrong impression to the reader, are calculated to convey much information of a country and people

little known, but who [the pages] contain much to interest the commercial and religious world. (*Chinese Repository* 1844: 215)

Much, but by no means all, of Bruguière's 1829 composition appears in Dean's translation. The entire initial section (on geography, climate, fauna and flora) is omitted, perhaps because it contained little new information of interest to the trading community at Canton, who were the readers of the *Repository*. Also, as the published English version informs us, 'The translation abridges the bishop's language a little in leaving out some minor particulars.' Some passages may have been regarded by Dean or by the editor of the journal as too critical. Some omitted passages were obviously of no value to local readers, including the sections about the Catholic Church and the Chinese in Bangkok, and the appended essay on the Thai language.

One wonders how and why Bruguière collected all his information, and why he sent it to the Vicar-General of Aire, who must have been an old friend in the southwest of France. It is not a simple record of first impressions of the country, because he had been working in Bangkok for two years by the time he completed the work. No doubt he obtained many of his facts from the elderly bishop, Florens, and much else from the local priests and the students at the college in Bangkok. He may have begun collecting information about natural history during his first visit to Penang and his transpeninsular adventure of 1827. He surely also consulted numerous books about Siam before he left France, especially the late seventeenth century works that discussed earlier mission work.

Several reasons for compiling this work are clear. Bruguière was originally assigned to Vietnam. But during his brief period of training at the seminary in Paris, he must have turned, for information about the nearby Siam Mission, to the most recent book on the subject: the two-volume study published in 1771 by François Turpin. Turpin's work was encyclopaedic and included geography, trade, flora, fauna, government and political history—all adapted from materials provided by the last bishop to reside in Ayutthaya, as Turpin himself never went to Siam. But it was more than 50 years out of date, and was concerned with Ayutthaya (a capital that no longer existed) and with the French mission that had vanished in wartime. Nothing substantial about the country and the Thai people had appeared in print since then in French. Bruguière may have intended his study to fill the need for a new reference work, for the benefit of students at the Paris seminary and to attract potential missionaries in France to the mission in Siam.

These intellectual endeavours were certainly inspired by the accomplishments of Charles Langlois, a mentor at the MEP Seminary, who was active in publishing works related to foreign missions in the 1820s. Further inspiration also came from the monumental work on Indian culture published in 1817 and 1825 by Jean-Antoine Dubois, a mentor at the seminary in Paris. But Bruguière did not have

the advantage of Dubois' long experience in the field or the intellectual inclination to detach himself from his subject. He inserted much misinformed commentary, tinged with strong theological prejudice, which detracted from its appeal to general readers.

Bruguière's efforts were already overshadowed by a much longer work in English by the British envoy, John Crawfurd, who visited Bangkok in 1822 and published an important reference work about the country in 1828. Crawfurd's book likewise overshadowed the more limited but scientific publication about the country by his own mission-colleague, George Finlayson, in 1826. Like the two Britons, Bruguière obtained a lot of his information at second hand. Unlike them, he had the advantages of long residence in the country (two years, compared with their visit of four months) and a knowledge of the Thai language. Also unlike them (both of whom had studied surgery at the University of Edinburgh), he had no training in sciences. He wrote from a very different perspective, as a theologian.

His work did not reach a wide audience and was largely forgotten except by French missionaries in training, who must have read it eagerly. For them, it was a useful introduction to Bangkok and the Thai people, and the most up-to-date work of its kind in French. But it ceased to be of use, even for this small audience, after the publication of a major reference work in 1854 by Bishop Pallegoix, who must have learned a great deal at the outset of his career from Bruguière's description. Pallegoix in turn was quickly overshadowed by the description of Siam published in 1857 by the British envoy, John Bowring, who drew some of his information from Bruguière's work, which he acknowledged.

The editors of the French missionary journal had another, practical reason for publishing the description. They had urged Florens to provide some interesting accounts of his mission for readers of the journal. But Bangkok was relatively peaceful and did not produce newsworthy events comparable to those in Vietnam, where missionaries were often persecuted, driven out of the country or killed by the authorities. If Bruguière intended his description to be published in the journal, he may have written it with fund-raising in mind, as a means of attracting the interest of pious European readers and stimulating them to donate generously to the foreign missions.

Annales de l'Association de la Propagation de la Foi
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 Lyon, Rusand / Paris, Rusand 1831 pp.63-215

**Letter from Mgr. Bruguière, Bishop of Capsa, to M. Bousquet,
 vicar-general of Aire¹**

[63] Bangkok, 1829

J.M.J. [Jesus, Mary, Joseph]

Good Sir, and dear friend,

You asked me for some information about the country where I now find myself, about the customs, practices, the religion of the inhabitants, etc. You demand of me a [64] huge undertaking. However, to prove to you that there is nothing I would not undertake to please you, I am going to apply myself to the task. I shall try to be as concise as possible, while omitting nothing essential. I do not propose to relate anything uncertain or doubtful. It is quite likely, though, that some inaccuracies may occur, but that will be involuntary; I am eye-witness to many of the facts related here. You may find some disorder in my account; please forgive this negligence. I have written at different times and only when I was free to do so, which was not often.

The apostolic vicariate constituting our mission includes all the provinces of the kingdom of Siam. The bishop [Mgr. Joseph Florens] even has under his jurisdiction several neighbouring states; he will certainly send missionaries to them when France supplies more.

¹ The English translation of Bruguière's 1829 letter, apparently by the American Protestant missionary William Dean (see Cordier 1912, I 733-4), which appeared in the April 1844 issue of *The Chinese Repository* (Canton), was prefaced by the words 'The translation abridges the bishop's language a little in leaving out some minor particulars'. This was accompanied by 'some notes at the foot of the page... furnished by a gentleman who has resided at Bangkok several years', whom Cordier also identifies as Dean. As the notes often give some balance to Bruguière's remarks, they have been included here as footnotes, prefaced with the initials CR. In this new translation, the punctuation of the original French text has not been respected, nor has the original paragraphing always been adhered to. The editors of this text would like to acknowledge their gratitude to the following for assistance provided: Père Moussay, archivist at the Missions Etrangères de Paris, Mme Claire Keefe-Fox at the Quai d'Orsay, Mgr Luigi Bressan, Archbishop of Trento, Mgr Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio, Bangkok, Dr Warren Brockelman of Mahidol University, Prof. Emeritus Vilaileka Thavornthanasarn of Ramkamhaeng University, Jarujin Nabhitabhata, a Director at the National Science Museum of Thailand, and Olivier Pauwels, the Gabon Country Manager of the Smithsonian Institution. Most of the footnotes appearing in this letter of 1829 were written by Kennon Breazeale; Michael Smithies is chiefly responsible for the translation of the letter from French.

[LOCATION]

The kingdom of Siam extends from the 5th to the 18th degrees in latitude north.² The width is very unequal; it is very narrow in the south, and quite broad in the north. It is bounded in the south by a small number of different Malay peoples, and in the north by some little-known tribes, whose territory extends as far as China; to the east by Cambodia, Cochinchina,³ and the sea; [65] to the west by the sea and the kingdoms of Pegu and Ava. Bangkok today is the capital of this realm, since Juthia [Ayutthaya] was burnt by the Burmese some 80 years ago.⁴

Bangkok is located at the end of the Gulf of Siam, more or less in the middle of the country, at the 13th and a half degree latitude north, and 90th degree longitude east (Paris meridian).

I should note that in the description of the kingdom of Siam which I have just given are included [66] a number of small kingdoms with their own names found on geographical maps. But they are all subject to Siam—such as Kedah, Ligor [Nakhon Sithammarat], Laos, etc.

[CLIMATE]

The climate of Siam is quite hot, but much less so than on the other side of the Ganges. (Every time I speak of the trans-Gangetic peninsula, I mean the peninsula so-called by the Europeans, or Indostan; this is relative to the different countries where one is located.) From the same latitude to the equator, to 8 degrees north or south, the heat is continual and excessive; winter chill is unknown, as are the gentle springtime temperatures; the sun like a glowing brazier heats the atmosphere. It is at times difficult to breathe. The relaxation of the nerves and organs, [and] continual and copious perspiration reduce the body to such a weak state that one does not have the strength to make the least movement. One begins to breathe when the sun nears its zenith, when the sky is covered with thick clouds which form for several months a kind of vast sunshade; abundant rains cool the atmosphere and allow the body to recover, These clouds always accompany the sun from north to south, to

² This is roughly correct, but does not of course include the northern fiefs joined to the state during the late nineteenth century. Bruguière's definition of Siam includes all the peninsular territory down to the Malay sultanates of Kedah and Patani and the territory in the Chao Phraya basin as far north as modern-day Tak and Uttaradit Provinces. The princely states farther north (such as Nan and Chiang Mai) were also considered to be within the sphere of the Siam Mission, although no missionaries worked there. A contemporary map of the French missions in mainland Southeast Asia was published with the title 'Carte du Tong-king, de la Cochinchine, de Siam et de la Birmanie' in *Annales de la propagation de la foi* 12 (1840): fold-out map facing p. 115.

³ There is an extended footnote here, probably by an editor of the missionary journal in Lyon, pointing out that Siam is not contiguous with Cochinchina, which claimed some authority over other parts of Laos, whose king was less a dependency of the king of Siam than the minor rulers of Kedah and Nakhon Sithammarat, who were more like provincial governors.

⁴ In 1767, as an added editorial footnote correctly states.

about the 20th degree latitude. At the beginning and sometimes the end of the rainy season, the sky seems to be on fire; for several hours non-stop claps of terrifying thunder can be heard. Lightning often strikes, and then the air calms. This is but silent thundering agitation and causes no harm. In all the lands of the tropics, the rivers periodically flood, at least once a year. That at Bangkok [67] has an unusual feature: it floods only a month after the rains have stopped. As the river increases in size, its waters become clear, and become muddy when the floods subside, that is, when the rains have stopped; it is not easy to discover what causes this.⁵

[TIDES]

At the end of the Gulf of Siam the tides are the reverse of those in Europe. Every year high tides occur in November and low tides in May. Every month the highest tides do not occur, as in France, on the first and thirteenth of the lunar month, but on the fifth and the nineteenth. In the daily tides [68], it is not when the moon has crossed the meridian that the tide is at its highest, but about five hours later. Towards the period of the new and full moon the tide rises for about twelve hours and goes down in about the same. The second tide is almost imperceptible during the other days of the moon. The tide rises and falls twice in twenty-four hours, as in France. You can write to the gentlemen in the longitude office to ask them to explain this phenomenon.⁶

[THE LAND]

The Kingdom of Siam is a flat land. On all sides are broad plains, huge forests, and marshes. There are few rivers of any size. A few hills or some precipitous mountains in the distance give relief to this monotonous aspect. The hills are little more than a mass of rocks covered with a thin layer of earth. In the higher places there is thick vegetation, but there is little or [69] almost none in the low-lying areas. The trees never lose their leaves; when the old leaves fall, new ones appear. There are though two kinds of trees entirely leafless for two to three months; these are the cassia [*Cassia siamea* (*Leguminosae*) ต้นชี้เหล็ก?] and a variety of cotton tree [*Ceiba pentandra* (*Malvaceae*) ต้นจันทน์น้อย or ต้นนุ่น?] which is different from those producing cotton in Europe. I have even seen a tree lose all its leaves at the same time and immediately others appear. It is a fully-grown tree, producing at the extremities of its branches small bunches of yellow flowers with a very strong scent.⁷ Malay women make a kind of oil or essence from this which they rub into their hair.

⁵ Another footnote appears in the original here, referring to Tonkin, and chiding Bruguère for over-generalizing about 'the rains, thunder, floods and other meteorological phenomena' in the tropics.

⁶ Another footnote here refers to the tides in the Gulf of Tonkin.

⁷ Probably the *Cassia fistula* (*Leguminosae*) called *ton kun* ต้นคูน in Thai and Indian laburnum in English.

The forests are full of wood which can be used in building. Some trees are extremely large, though their bulk does not correspond to their height. One often sees in these woods decayed tree trunks, the remains of old trees, bowled down by time, from which fresh sprigs appear which will replace them. There are few trees bearing edible fruit; the fruits to be found are usually bitter and sometimes dangerous.

When you travel through these forests you have to take your own provisions. It is unwise to carry money, as to do so, one risks being killed.

[BIRDS]

These forests are full of game. They contain many birds unknown in Europe, and whose song is disagreeable; none of these birds has the melodious sound of the nightingale or the warbler. Only piercing, lugubrious and monotonous cries are to be heard. The most frequently met kinds of birds are peacocks, cockatoos, and parrots of all colours. There is also a small bird no bigger than one's thumb; its plumage is delightful, part red, part white, with [70] touches of green. Unless I am mistaken, it is what Europeans call the colibri or hummingbird. Also to be found in these woods are wild cocks and hens, whose sounds, shapes and plumage are exactly the same as domesticated fowls. I have often heard them crow in the depths of the forests. To seize the male, a domesticated cock is placed in a remote spot, surrounded by a net. The wild cock immediately appears to fight the newcomer. The hunter hidden in the bushes pulls the net and the cock is caught. I have seen black swans, but I believe they do not originate in Siam. Among the large birds are those the Siamese call *Noc-Ariam*.⁸ When it walks, its head is a foot and a half above an average-sized man, and is proportionately big. Its feathers are ash-grey and sometimes the neck and the top of its back are red. Its head is as big as a man's; its beak, nearly two feet long, is shaped like a cone. It sometimes flies so high it is out of view but its piercingly sharp cry announces its presence, even when its high flight path puts it out of one's sight. This bird feeds only on seeds and plants. Its eggs are like those of an ostrich. It is commonly found in Siam, and sometimes flies around our seminary.

I have seen a bird of prey, called *Noccasoun*⁹ which has a special way of satisfying its needs; when it has not been successful in its hunt, it attacks the vulture, seizes it by the throat and forces it to share the prey the vulture has just devoured. This unusual fight often takes place in Bangkok in the place where they cut up the dead. I shall tell you later what I mean on cutting up the dead.¹⁰

⁸ Probably one of several species of vulture called *nok i-raeng* นกอินรี.

⁹ *Nok casun* is perhaps *nok kratung* นกกระตู่, any of several species of pelican.

¹⁰ This took place at the base of the Golden Mount temple and is mentioned by many nineteenth century visitors. See the section on death rites.

[QUADRUPEDS]

[71] The most interesting of the four-footed animals in the forests of Siam is firstly the monkey. They are to be found in all shapes and sizes. There is one which can more or less walk like a man, but its knees appear paralyzed, so it drags its legs and stands with difficulty when it has fallen on the ground. This is probably the ape which Buffon¹¹ called Orang-Utang; indeed the Malays call the men who live in the forests Orang-Utang.¹²

Near Tonkin is said to be found a very dangerous ape. If it comes across a man in the middle of the forest, it takes him by the arms, and starts to laugh for all its worth for a long time, finally killing the unfortunate traveller. When one has to pass through these forests, one takes two lengths of bamboo (the bamboo is a kind of very high and thick reed with branches; it is good to eat when young. People in the Indies use bamboo a lot; their houses, furniture and seats are made of bamboo, they make sails, boxes etc. of it). When the ape appears, one places both arms in the bamboos. Usually the ape seizes the traveller's arms, or rather the bamboo covering them. One then gently extricates one's arms from the bamboo, without the ape being aware of it, and thrusts a dagger in the beast. This is not difficult, because the animal closes its eyes when it laughs.

There is another type of ape which could be called a legless cripple; it can hardly take a single step, so weak are its legs. But this handicap is eminently compensated by the ease with which it leaps from tree to tree, remaining suspended by its front legs. I think I saw one in Java.¹³

[72] A few years ago there appeared in Siam an animal previously entirely unknown: it is a four-footed beast the size of a bull; its head is similar to an ape's. It has a long thick tail, its neck and the top of its shoulders are red, the rest of the body is black. One of our Christians killed one a few years ago. When it appears anywhere, all the wild beasts flee while it is around. Its cry, similar to the roaring of a lion, causes the tiger to tremble. Its presence has been recently noted near Chantaburi. It is thought this animal came from China.¹⁴

Also to be found in these forests are gazelles, he-goats, buffaloes, and bears. There are two kinds of bears; one is similar to those found in France, but blacker; this one is timid and runs away when it sees humans. The other kind is very fierce, the size of a calf, with reddish hair. Voltaire was not prepared to believe there were bears in Palestine; what would he have said if he had met some in the forests of

¹¹ George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), author of *Histoire Naturelle* (44 volumes from 1749).

¹² More correctly *orang-hutan*, men of the forests.

¹³ This sounds very much like the orang-utang again.

¹⁴ This may be a gaur, a species of large wild ox.

Siam? Is it cooler here than in Jerusalem?¹⁵ There are also wild boars, rhinoceros and unicorns.¹⁶ After the elephant, the rhinoceros is the biggest and strongest of the four-footed animals; its head is similar to that of a pig and it has two horns one at the end of its nose, the other much smaller. The unicorn, to judge by the head that hunters brought to Penang some time back, is much bigger than a bull; it differs from the rhinoceros in shape and the positioning of its horn; it is on its forehead and points upwards. This beast always runs in a straight [73] line; the stiffness of its neck and its whole body do not allow it to move to one side. It has difficulty in stopping once it has dashed off. It overturns with its horn or cuts with its teeth medium-sized trees which obstruct its path. Thus the unicorn is not a fabulous animal, as some philosophers have insinuated to contradict the holy scriptures. It is a real animal, different from all the others. Excellent potions are made from its horn, teeth, blood and heart, which are sold very expensively.¹⁷

[ELEPHANTS]

Of all the quadrupeds found in the forests, the elephant is without doubt the most curious and the most useful. Siam, of all the countries in the Indies, has the most. The Asian elephant is much bigger and stronger than the African one. It is from nine to thirteen feet high, and its tusks are commonly five feet long¹⁸ and fifteen inches in circumference. I have measured some more than six feet long; they are hollow at their root and end in a point. This is a very dangerous animal when it roams alone in the forests, and cruelly kills any unfortunate traveller it comes across. Sometimes it lifts a man up in the air with its trunk, throws him down violently, and runs its tusks through him; sometimes it crushes a man under its feet. Occasionally it digs a hole in the sand and buries him alive. It is not always safe, to avoid its wrath, to climb up a tree, for if the tree is not big, it batters it down. It is said that if the tree is too big, it calls out to other elephants. When they are assembled in sufficient numbers, they water the foot of the tree with the aid of their trunks, tear up its roots and overturn it.¹⁹

[74] Reduced to domestication, the elephant appears quite different: it is gentle, docile, and intelligent. It obeys the commands of its keeper, comes at his call, gives him its trunk when so ordered. When it is tired, it beats the ground with its trunk, making a sound rather like a horn, to warn its mahout that it is finally time to rest. As present we have two in Bangkok, one of which often goes to the market

¹⁵ This reference to Voltaire's work has not been traced.

¹⁶ Bruguère repeats this below and later on [98]. What could this animal have been? It is possibly a mistranslation from Thai, or maybe a single-horned rhinoceros.

¹⁷ It would seem Bruguère did not himself see the specimen mentioned in Penang.

¹⁸ Uncommonly, rather.

¹⁹ A tall elephant tale, perhaps.

in search of fruit; when it has filled its trunk, it returns and shares with its mahout the results of its trip. The other stands by the entrance to the king's palace, and a big receptacle full of rice, together with a spoon, are brought to it. The elephant takes the spoon with its trunk and distributes rice to all the passing talapoins.²⁰

It is difficult to believe how much affection the elephant has for its master, if there were not convincing proof of the fact. When its mahout falls asleep in the middle of the forest, it chases away insects which could inconvenience him. If he falls asleep when night has already come, it gently places him on its trunk and conveys him to his cabin. I have been assured that at the approach of a wild elephant, it takes its mahout, who is seated on its neck, encircles him with its trunk, places him below his mouth and fights with its tusks. The affection it has for its mahout causes it to place him in safety before attacking its adversary.

When travelling, the elephant eats little in the daytime, but spends the whole night filling its large stomach. It eats hay, tree leaves and grains of rice. It loves sugarcane and especially alcoholic drinks. But one has to be careful not to let it drink them, for when drunk it does not acknowledge any master. [75] It sleeps little, lying down on one side, unless its mahout has tied its two rear feet to a tree. An elephant loves water, it enjoys marshy areas, and happily walks in the rain. When it comes across water, it sprays itself using its trunk. If it finds none, it extracts some from the depths of its stomach. It throws earth on itself, and wipes itself with a handful of hay or with the branch of a tree which is also used to chase away any insects troubling it. It goes down on its belly to receive its load or the traveller who is to ride it. It does the same thing when it encounters deep mud pits; it slides on its stomach and knees. The weight of its body is thus spread over a bigger base, and it sinks into the mud less. If it comes up to a river, it first sounds out with its trunk the depth of the water. If it touches bottom, it walks on, but if it finds none, it plunges in and swims under water, returning to the surface to breathe, then plunges again, and so on until reaching the other bank. Only the elephant can be used as a mount for long journeys; in the midst of marshy terrain, where no passage or path is discernable, where one travels axe in hand to clear a way, the elephant helps with its trunk and its feet overturning or splitting branches and medium-sized trees. From time to time one has to cry out to rally those in the party, and the guide sometimes lays down small branches on the path he has taken, so those following do not lose their way. There are some places so covered in undergrowth that it has to be burnt down. Instead of a saddle, the elephant's back carries a big covered basket; the traveller is seated [76] in it as best he can. He has to cover his face and head, otherwise he runs the risk of dying, as the sun penetrates the skin to the point of drawing blood.

²⁰ The word *talapoin* was at this period commonly employed by Westerners to refer to Siamese Buddhist monks. It will be retained here.

The elephant is very strong, and can carry on its back parts of guns, men, etc. It can be made to walk more than twenty-four hours when one takes care to see it is well fed. I have ridden one which was made to walk for more than fifty hours; it only had six hours to eat and rest in that time. I pitied the poor beast, but it was not in my hands to procure it some respite.

I am sure you will read with pleasure what I am about to relate concerning the way wild elephants are tamed.²¹ In March, a few female elephants are freed in the woods. Soon after, they are recalled with the sound of a horn, and return accompanied by a considerable number of wild elephants. All are led into an area with high palisades, [and] the door is closed on them. Men placed on a terrace protected in front by thick tree trunks throw over the elephant they want to capture a net or snare, and entangle it by its feet. There are no tortures they do not inflict on it when it is in their hands. With the help of a machine, they lift it in the air, beat it, ignite a fire under its belly, leave it without food a long time. They violently knock it over, run it through with a sharp iron, and finally, through the violence of these torments, force it to accept a master. The domesticated elephants help in these procedures, surrounding the wild elephant, threatening it, and forcing it to walk. The greatest number of elephants is taken a short distance from Ayutthaya.

[77] It is very difficult to kill this beast with a firearm, as a bullet does not penetrate its skin. It has some parts of its body through which it can be mortally wounded, namely the eyes and the top of its head. This is the same for the rhinoceros and the unicorn.

[OTHER QUADRUPEDS]

While it is dangerous to meet, in these forests, any of the animals I have mentioned, the danger is much greater if one meets a tiger. This is unquestionably the fiercest of all these animals; its rage or fury can be seen in its eyes; it relishes in blood; its audacity equals its cruelty. It attacks an elephant, taking an upper hand by lacerating its trunk, jumping on its back and often ending by consuming it. When an elephant sees a tiger approaching, it puts its trunk in its mouth and presents its tusks. When a tiger sees that force will not succeed, it employs ruse. It is heartless and unfeeling; it could even be said that kind treatment irritates it rather than mollifies it; someone caring for it is often the first victim of its cruelty. It is endowed with remarkable speed and agility. The tiger is like a cat in the shape of its body and the way it seizes its prey. In Siam there are three kinds of tigers: the biggest, which the natives call Sua-Crong [süa khrong เสือโคร่ง, the tiger (*Felis tigris*)], is the most dangerous. This kind is as big as a calf and its skin is streaked red, white, yellow and black. The second kind of tiger is called Sua-Dau [süa dao เสือดาว, probably

²¹ Such accounts were standard fare in any description of Siam from the seventeenth century.

the leopard (*Felis viverrina*), literally the ‘spotted cat’], as big as a large mastiff; this does not attack a man head-on, and cannot tolerate his looks; it waits for the moment when it cannot be seen; its skin is mottled with small black and yellow patches spotted with white. The third kind has a skin like a grey cat’s, but is twice as big. It always flees [78] man and feeds on fish, birds and chickens. It stalks at night around henhouses and attacks everything it meets. It is a kind of fox and the Siamese call it Sua-Pla [sua pla เสือปลา, literally the fishing cat].

Tigers climb up slightly sloping trees, but cannot climb those that are straight. Do you think that in the elephant and the tiger there is a vestige of the dominion God gave over the other animals to Adam? As I have said, the tiger cannot endure a man’s look, and even when it has devoured him, it tears away the skin on his skull, covering his face with it, to spare it the view of such a frightful sight for it. An elephant likewise can hardly endure seeing a man placed directly in front of it, even some distance away, and to make him move to one side, it ejects a jet of water from its bowels and sprays the indiscrete beholder; when it is about to pierce a man with its tusks, it closes its eyes, which sometime allows its would-be victim the possibility to escape.

There are many squirrels in Siam; there are some, among others, which fly, so to speak, without having wings; the skin beside the ears spreads out broadly, allowing it to reduce the weight of its body. It flies from a tree in a diagonal line, towards another that is less high.

I do not wish to end the comments on quadrupeds without telling you about a kind of rat as big as a cat. When tamed it is used in houses to catch smaller rats than itself and to kill insects. Cats, which have the reputation of not living peacefully with [79] rats, do not quarrel with this type of rat; they respect it because they are afraid of it. When we passed through Kedah, the governor presented one of these rats to the Siamese ambassador,²² but he gave two elephants to the English envoy.²³

[LIZARDS]

In Siam, as in other parts of the Indies, there are numerous lizards. The most notable are:

1. the schalin [Thai ching len จิ้งเหลน, *Scincus officinalis*, the skink], which has small wings or membranes which it spreads when it wants to run more quickly; we found some near Ligor.

²² This person travelled in the company of Bruguière to Nakhon Sithammarat; Bruguière related his meeting with the envoy in another letter addressed to the superior of the seminary of Foreign Missions in Paris, dated 20 June 1827.

²³ Almost certainly Henry Burney, who visited Penang in 1826 and 1827, and reported on affairs at Kedah.

2. the toukay [tukae ตุ๊กแก or gecko], which is quite big and usually lives in inhabited places; it even settles in beds. The Siamese confuse it, catch it with tobacco and eat it.

3. the hias [hia เขี้ย or monitor lizards], which are grey, live in forests and are about three feet long. I have seen some on this side of Thalang.²⁴

4. the takum,²⁵ which are eight to ten feet long, live in deserted spots, and do not harm man. One of our students encountered one near the sea, some time ago, but hardly had the lizard noticed it than it fled into the forest.

5. the crocodile, a kind of amphibious lizard sometimes 22 feet long; its voracity is in proportion to its size, and it delights in human flesh. If a small boat goes near the bank of the river, the crocodile pushes its head against the sand and, bending its back, tips the boat over and devours those inside. It is mostly in the Cambodian river [the Mekong] that the crocodile employs this stratagem. This monster has a mouth filled with four rows of very sharp teeth; when it is old, four of its teeth protrude from its mouth, like the tusks of a wild boar, in the shape of a half circle. Some crocodiles have a reddish back, others [80] have a dark brown back, but the underbelly is white. I have seen only this last type; there are many in the river at Bangkok. There are also some sharks which go upstream for some distance.

[SNAKES]

There are several varieties of snakes, some of which are extremely poisonous.²⁶ There are:

1. *Ngu-luam* [*ngu lüam* งูเห่า, the python] (*ngu* in Siamese means snake). It sometimes is as thick as a medium-sized beam, and is proportionately long. Its skin is magnificent, making a variegated pattern of very diverse colours. I have seen one still very young; even so, it was nine feet long and six inches in circumference, and swallowed a chicken with the greatest ease. Its parent swallowed a bull. To seize its prey, it hides behind some tree trunks or in the undergrowth, fixes its tail to a tree and forms a circle with the rest of its body. Deer, monkey, or buffalo passing by are taken as in a noose; the snake holds them in several coils and suffocates them; sometimes it places them against the tree to which it is attached and squashes them so violently that it breaks and crushes all their bones; it covers them with its saliva and then swallows them. Its gullet can expand extraordi-

²⁴ Thalang, the old administrative centre of Phuket. The Thai name is derived from the name of the Malay settlement, Ujung Salang, as are numerous European variations such as Jong Céylan and Junk Ceylon.

²⁵ Not identified. Possibly one of the larger monitor lizards.

²⁶ Some of the snakes mentioned by the bishop are described in Cox (1991), which provides extensive illustrations.

ily. This snake is not poisonous. It crawls with difficulty; if seen in time, one can easily avoid it and flee. The *ngu luam* is probably that which Buffon described to us as the divine serpent.

2. *Ngu-xang* [*ngu nguang chang* งูวงช้าง, *Acrochordus javanicus*, the elephant's-trunk snake], or elephant snake, so called because its tail is like an elephant's trunk; it is tanned, shorter than the *ngu luam*, but as broad. In autumn these two kinds of snakes come into Bangkok. We caught one last year in the garden. [81]

3. *Ngu-kon-kop* [*ngu kon khop* งูกันขบ, *Cylindrophus rufus*].²⁷ This is a medium-sized snake, mottled black and white; it is poisonous at the head and tail. If it bites, there is a remedy, but if it stings with its tail, there is none. A person stung feels suddenly faint, falls down, a deadly chill spreads through all his limbs and he dies immediately. I have seen one of these snakes which our students killed. *Ngu-kon-kop* means the snake which wounds with its tail.

4. *Ngu-fai*, meaning the fire snake.²⁸ This is probably the same kind which God sent to the desert to punish the Hebrews.²⁹ It is impregnated with so strong and burning a venom that it destroys all the plants it passes over; if it is touched with a dry wooden stick, the wood burns and takes on the colour of coal. It does not have the same effect on living or freshly-cut wood. Misfortune to anyone who comes near it; he dies the moment he is bitten. When the snake is dead, it can be touched with impunity.

5. *Ngu-sam-lian* [*ngu sam liam* งูสามเหลี่ยม, *Bungarus fasciatus*, the banded krait] is called the triangular snake because of its shape. It is poisonous, but more dangerous by night than by day. If a man walks in the dark, with a pitch-covered torch in his hand, this snake jumps at him. Nothing can be done when it is seen, but to throw the torch far away and flee. The snake at once runs after the flame.

²⁷ The name of the red-tailed pipe snake (*kon khop*) implies literally that its tail can bite. When disturbed, it makes a display of the tail, to detract attention from the head, and some people believe that both tail and head can bite—hence the popular name *ngu song hua* งูสองหัว, the snake with two heads. McFarland (1944: 5) describes this snake as non-poisonous.

²⁸ The fire snake (*ngu fai* งูไฟ) may be the red cat-eye snake, *ngu tong fai* งูตองไฟ (*Boiga nigriceps*), which can be an intensive hue of red. The idea of a snake that can cause wood to burn must be the bishop's misunderstanding, rather than a fanciful tale. He may have asked about the meaning of the name, and was told that it refers to a snake whose body resembles the burning embers of a fire. He may, however, be referring to the Malayan pit viper *Calloselasma rhodostoma*, which is likewise red.

²⁹ Bruguière's attempts to identify animals in Siam with Biblical references, and thus with known animals of the eastern Mediterranean, reflect the relative lack of knowledge about the spread and development of different species across long distances. One wonders whether the vicar-general of Aire had an interest in unusual animals or whether Bruguière hoped that his observations might catch the attention of scientists and thus make a contribution to French knowledge of biology.

One of the bishop's servants was almost the victim of its fury a few years back. He avoided the danger only by throwing away the torch he had in his hand.

6. *Ngu-hau* [the cobra], that is, the barking snake,³⁰ is a viper, as thick as one's arm. Its bite is fatal and causes unbelievable suffering. This snake sometimes imitates [82] the sound of a bell. Sometimes it whistles in such a way as to be heard some distance away. A few years ago the bishop was almost bitten by one of these vipers. It was beside his bed-head. The good Lord caused him to see it when it was still sleeping, which enabled him to kill it. One variety of these vipers has a bite that causes a man to have heart failure. The body of a person bitten turns green. After three hours the sick person dies if not given help within the first hour of being bitten. A Siamese was bitten by one of these snakes in our garden, but there was time to apply the remedy.³¹

7. *Ngu-ngon-kai*, [*ngu ngòn kai* งูทองไก่], meaning the snake with a cock's comb. This snake is remarkable only for its poison, and the comb or crest on its head. It is perhaps the regulus the prophet Isaiah speaks about.³²

8. *Ngu-sung-travan*, [*ngu saeng tawan*, also called *ngu saeng athit* งูแสงอาทิตย์, *Xenopeltis unicolor*], meaning sunbeam snake. This is the most beautiful of snakes and one of the most dangerous. It is half an ell³³ in length. It is sky blue, shading into purple. Its skin is covered in scales. When the sun is on the horizon, it sparkles like crystal. Its scales continually give off showers of sparks somewhat like sunbeams. It loses its brilliance at night, but resumes it in the light of torches. Its bite is fatal. It is said though that some people know an effective antidote when it is applied the moment one is bitten. This snake is the very image of sin; externally it is delightful, while concealing a deadly venom. It is extraordinary that the person bitten by this snake always dies as soon as the sun has risen after the incident. So that, whether bitten at [83] seven in the morning or at midnight, one will certainly die the next day at sunrise. This snake is fairly common; we have some behind the seminary chapel; fortunately it does not move very quickly.

9. *Ngu-pling* [งูปลิง *Enhydria plumbea*, plumbeous water snake], that is, leech snake. This is as long as one's finger, and the colour of a leech. It is usually only found in marshes, where it lives in the mud. Anyone unfortunate enough to be bitten by this snake dies almost instantly.

³⁰ The word *hao* in the Thai name for the cobra (*ngu hao* งูเห่า) literally means 'barking' in the context of dogs, but should be translated 'hissing' in this context.

³¹ We are unfortunately not told what this potentially useful remedy was.

³² The Book of Isaiah (30: 6) in the Latin Bible refers to *vipera et regulus volans* ('a viper and a flying serpent').

³³ An ell is roughly 45 inches (114 cm).

10. *Ngu-khiang-khon* [*ngu khwang khòn* งูขว้างค้อน, maybe *Enhydris plumbea*, a water snake], the snake that attacks man.³⁴ It is chiefly found by certain beaches. It jumps in the boats near the shore, attacks men, winding itself around their necks, and kills them with its poison.

11. *Ngu-sing*.³⁵ This snake is non-poisonous. When it sees a man, it runs towards him, turning its body in a circle. If it reaches him, it gives him a sharp blow with its tail, and continues its trajectory. Such an unusual incident happened to one of our priests.

12. *Ngu-samelang*.³⁶ This is a poisonous sea-snake. Its bite is not painful, but its effect is nonetheless fatal. A person bitten by it after a time feels drowsy and so to speak is forced to sleep. Too bad for the person who gives in to this desire, as once asleep he will not wake up. The patient can be saved only by preventing him from falling asleep, even if the most violent means are used in doing so. After twenty-four hours he is out of danger. This snake is identified by the way it swims; it rises on the surface of the water and goes to the depths in a perpendicular line very quickly. This snake [84] and others too are found in great numbers in these waters, chiefly in straits and near the coasts. I have seen some myself, but did not know what kind of snakes they were. Several people have spoken to me about a snake with wings, but I do not want to mention them here because not one of those who spoke about them had seen one. If true, the dragon, which the ancients have so often described, is not a mythical animal; I believe the Bible is avenged in speaking about this winged serpent.

The Burmese in Bangkok are like the Psylles³⁷ in ancient Egypt. They appear in public with snakes in their hands or wound about their neck. They provoke them to fight each other, have them bite them, put them in their mouth, and go so far as to seize them in their holes with their bare hands. They know about several plants, the sap of which halts the effects of the poison. It is true they are sometimes the victims of their recklessness. Often the poison is stronger than the plant's qualities, and the doctor dies in spite of his specialized knowledge. During the flood period one sees the most snakes; some climb up into the trees. It is a terrible sight, to see a tree festooned with snakes. This does not often occur, as there are nearly always some places which are not flooded. I have heard many other things concerning snakes, but they did not seem to me to be sufficiently convincing, so I shall not mention

³⁴ *Khiang* must be a transcription error. The spelling should be *khwang*. The name literally means the 'hurling hammer' snake, a reflection of its ability to jump or hurl its body short distances.

³⁵ Several species of snake are called *ngu sing*, including *ngu sing thammada* งูสิงธรรมดา (*Ptyas korros*) and *ngu sing hang lai* งูสิงหางลาย (*Ptyas mucosa*). Both are called rat snakes in English.

³⁶ The *samaerang* แสมรัง belong to the genus *Hydrophis*. Cox (1991: 321–34) describes twelve species of these sea snakes or mangrove snakes in Thailand.

³⁷ The Psylles were a people of ancient Egypt and Libia, mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BC and known as snake-charmers.

them. They may be true, but are not certain. The Burmese and some Siamese eat snakes; to make them bigger and fatter they put sour lime in the hole occupied by the snake. Snakes do not like the smell of sour lime and retreat inside the den³⁸ as much as they can. They contract, but gain in thickness what they lose in length [85]. After a few days the Burmese and Siamese dig into the hole and kill the snake.

[INSECTS]

I shall here give a few comments about poisonous and non-poisonous insects.³⁹

Throughout this part of the Indies one finds two varieties of scorpions, black and yellow. The black ones are absolutely the same as those you find in France; they are sometimes four or five inches long. Their sting is incurable, and the patient dies within 24 hours, suffering terrible agonies. The yellow scorpions are longer; they have many legs, and are four to ten inches long. The biggest are found in the forests near the mountains. Their sting has the same effect as that of black scorpions, [but] if it is not fatal, the pain eases after 24 hours.

There are also three types of leech. [One is found] in the sea, as thick as one's leg. The Siamese eat them, and say they are delicious. They are on sale every day in the Bangkok market.⁴⁰ The second type is the freshwater leech. It differs from yours only in that it is sometimes three fingers wide, and up to a foot long. The third type lives in the earth and does not need water; it is small.

Among the non-poisonous insects are:

1. *Bees*, of which there are four types. The biggest is similar to a hornet. The second does not differ from the ordinary bee; it is found everywhere, and people do not trouble to keep it. It places its honeycombs in the hollows of old trees, and sometimes builds them on branches; the honey is excellent. The third type is a little bigger [86] than a gnat; in Penang its honey is collected to make vinegar. The smallest type is like a tiny midge; its honey is produced in such small quantities that no one bothers to collect it.

2. *Hinghoi* [หิ่งห้อย], small fireflies. These are like small flying stars found in great numbers in the woods. They are delightful to behold on a dark night. Each branch of a tree seems to give off electric sparks.

³⁸ Bruguère uses the term *la caverne*, perhaps referring to the enlarged underground den at the end of the entrance hole.

³⁹ The term 'insect' is used in a loose sense for small crawling or flying animals, and not in the scientific sense. His first two examples are not insects but arachnids (scorpions) and annelids (leeches).

⁴⁰ These edible delicacies are *Holothuria edulis*, also known as sea cucumbers or *bêche-de-mer*. They are echinoderms and unrelated to the leech, which is an annelid. Bruguère thought they were a type of leech, because the prefix to the Thai word for sea cucumber (*pling-thale* ปลิงทะเล) is also the Thai word for leech (*pling* ปลิง).

3. *Mosquitoes*. They are widespread in Bangkok and extremely unpleasant; their bite causes a powerful burning itching. They are most numerous at the end of the rainy season. One can hardly protect oneself against them except by surrounding oneself in thick smoke.

4. *Ants*. No insect in Siam is so bothersome, so numerous and so diverse. There are white, black, red and grey ants; some fly, others crawl. There are small ones, medium-sized ones, and some as big as one's thumb. They are ubiquitous, on the earth, in trees; they can be eaten and drunk; they are in our bedrooms with us. They are everywhere with us, even on the altar; they spoil all our edibles, bore through wood, eat up books. Bookcases are placed in water to be preserved from their voraciousness. Even so, one has to take care that the vases containing the water are very big, otherwise the books would not last long. The ants form a pontoon and with the help of this, reach their destination. The talapoins build their libraries in the middle of a pool; they have to take a boat to go and study.

[TREES]

I have seen no tree in Siam which is known in Europe, [87] apart from the orange and the pomegranate. I shall only speak about those whose names you know.

1. The palm tree. There are several kinds, such as the date palm, the coconut palm, the sago palm, the betel palm, and what the Siamese call the tontan [ต้นตาล *Borassus flabelliformis*, palmyra or sugar-palm]. All these trees commonly have a bare, straight, high and very supple trunk. They are topped by a splendid plume consisting of several leaves or branches which curve down in a half-circle, like feathers on a hat, which they resemble. The date, or the palm proper, produces an oblong bunch of fruit enclosing dates, which are sticky, yellow, or sometimes blackish. This fruit is delicious, has a sweet taste, but heats one.

2. The coconut (it has been proven that coconut trees grow from the seabed on the coasts of Siam).⁴¹ The average height of this tree is 45 feet; I have seen some, though, which were nearly 100 feet high, including the leaves, which are from 12 to 20 feet long by 3½ broad. Its fruit is in the form of a nut, which is twice as big as a man's head and contains a slightly sweet and very fresh beverage. The inner wall of the nut is covered with a white substance that is tough and hardly healthy. It tastes rather like almonds. A liquor the colour and taste of milk is made from it, as is oil. The nut is enveloped in a thick and elastic skin like oakum. When the fruit is ripe, whatever the height of the tree, the shell does not break on falling. The coconut has nearly always fruit and flowers at the same time. There are some

⁴¹Bruguière actually writes 'at the bottom of the sea', which gives the wrong impression. The relevant point is that they can grow in shallow salt water.

coconut trees which produce nuts hardly bigger than one's thumb, but others can be as big as a bushel.⁴²

3. The sago. One does not eat [88] the fruit of this tree, but the wood. The trunk is cut into small pieces, boiled, and a substance containing small grains which you call sago is formed from it.

4. The betel palm produces a fruit similar to a small nut, only good for being chewed by the natives.

5. The *ton-tan* has nothing special about it; on the leaves of this tree the talapoins write their religious texts.⁴³

6. The tamarind. This is a thickly-leaved tree, as high as a big elm; its leaves are dark green, as long and as broad as a finger; they are scalloped like the mimosa. Its flowers are small and bright yellow; its fruit is like a big pea pod, the inside of which is divided into small bays covered with a kind of yellow,⁴⁴ sticky, acidic paste. Very healthy preserves are made with it, which taste like fruit preserved in grape juice.

7. The nutmeg tree has leaves more or less like a cherry tree, but paler, thicker, and less pointed; its five or six branches grow at an equal distance from the trunk and form a circle; above the first branches is another circle, and so on, until there are five or six levels of ever-diminishing size. Its fruit is like a small green peach; the nutmeg is located in the middle of the pulp.

8. The clove tree. People in the Indies send you the embryo of its flower after the leaves have fallen; this is what you call the clove.⁴⁵

9. The cacao tree has smooth pale green leaves; it forms a lozenge two inches long by three-quarters of an inch wide. It produces a pod as long as a finger, in the shape of two cones joined at the base. This pod contains flat yellow bays, like a big bean. The kernel from which one makes chocolate is found in the bays. The [89] fruit is directly attached to the trunk and to big branches. The tree is like a pyramid, the trunk whitish.

⁴² Normally a measure of capacity, some eight gallons or 34 litres; a single nut could not be this big.

⁴³ They do so on a variety of palm, producing palm leaves (*bai lan*) for manuscripts.

⁴⁴ It is more often dark brown.

⁴⁵ Bruguère notes below that some of the trees he describes are found only in Penang and not in Siam. Finlayson (1826: 27–9) observed at Penang in 1821 that cloves, nutmeg and coffee had already become important commercial crops there. Neither the clove tree (*Eugenia carophyllata* ต้นครามพลู or กานพลู) nor the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao* ต้นโกโก้) was commercially cultivated in Siam. Coffee drinking was very rare in Bangkok in the 1830s, although some of the Thai elite had begun to adopt it (Bradley journal entry for 27 March 1839).

10. The coffee plant has leaves fairly similar to a common laurel, but not so thick. The flower is small, white and pleasant; it has a small green fruit which turns red when ripe. The fruit or fleshy substance contains the small beans, the coffee beans.

11. Tea. This bush, seven or eight feet high, has a completely [leaf-]covered trunk and is shaped like a cone balanced on its base. It is like a sloe tree in the shape of its leaves and the tips bristling from it. Its flower is white and sweet-smelling, and it is a bit like an apple tree. It produces a berry a little bigger than a pea. The leaves are gathered, roasted, and this is what you call tea.

12. The cinnamon tree is similar to a variety of laurel. Cinnamon is only the second bark of this tree. I know of no cinnamon in Siam, but I thought you would like to hear about it.⁴⁶

13. The pepper vine is a kind of ivy trained to grow on hop poles. It produces a bunch as long as a finger, the seeds are attached to this bunch, and these small seeds are nothing less than pepper. White pepper has been shelled, black pepper is unshelled.

14. The vine. A kind of wild vine is found in Bangkok and nearby; the vine stock and shoots are covered with a sort of violet fur. The leaves are rather rough to touch; the grape it produces never comes to full maturity and is sour. Wine can be made with it if it is fermented with sugar; this mixture produces a liquor with the taste of Cyprus wine. There are some [90] places where it is not necessary to mix sugar with the must; the grape produces a passably good wine which can be kept for at least ten years. The bishop has done this. The Siamese do not cultivate this vine, which could produce good grapes if it were tended and planted in a favourable location. It cannot be propagated by cuttings, as the vine shoot dries up as soon as it is cut, but the seeds can be planted; the resultant vine stock produces fruit after three years. This vine produces everywhere many bunches of grapes, but some places are especially propitious for its fecundity. There is an island near one of our Christian outposts (I use these words because I cannot find better ones to describe a bringing-together of Christians forming something similar to a parish)⁴⁷ where this wild vine is common. Some of the vine stocks bear as many as 30 bunches, just one of which produces sometimes 12, 15 or even 18 bottles of wine. The seed is a little smaller than a plum's; the pip is as big as the coffee bean, but not so thick. A man can carry a bunch some distance only with difficulty. All

⁴⁶The best quality cinnamon was produced in Ceylon, which became the main centre of export to Europe. Lesser quality cinnamon was exported from Vietnam and Java, and a wild variety grew in Thai territory on the western side of the Malay peninsula. The fact that the Thai have a name for cinnamon (*opchoei* อปจอย) demonstrates that it was well known to them, probably more for its medicinal uses than for cooking.

⁴⁷ The word actually used is *chrétienté*.

these details I have from the bishop himself. He has spoken to me several times about this subject, has seen the fruit, and I have seen the pips.⁴⁸ Mr de Vaussal,⁴⁹ the naturalist, took some to France; after that, can one be surprised about what the Holy Spirit⁵⁰ relates concerning the fertility of Palestine?

15. The cotton plant. Its branches and leaves, which are few, are like the lilac; it has a small white flower shaped like a bell-flower; the cotton and the seed are enclosed in a membrane-like envelope the size of a thumb; it opens naturally when the cotton is mature. To separate the seeds from the cotton, [91] a small machine is used. It has two horizontal cylinders, turned with a handle and placed one above the other. The cotton falls to one side and the seeds to the other. The cotton is then beaten with a cane to mix it up. A bowstring can also be used for this, producing what you call raw cotton. There is another type of cotton plant, but the cotton it produces has threads too short to be used for making cloth.

16. The cassia is very similar to the acacia, but has no thorns; its flowers are small, yellow, and fragrant. You probably know that its fruit is as thick as one's finger and a foot long; some are much bigger. It is black, and has medicinal qualities.

Orange trees are very common, and one variety produces oranges as big as melons; the French call it grapefruit.⁵¹

Some of the trees I have described to you are only found in Penang, but as this island is included in our mission,⁵² I thought it best to make no distinction.

In the forests of Siam is found a tree with sweet-smelling wood; it is much sought after by persons of rank; it is, unless I am mistaken, the tree the Europeans call eagle-wood.⁵³ There is another kind of sweet-smelling wood which is very expensive; the Siamese call it *kalam-pae*.⁵⁴ It is found only in a forest in the domains

⁴⁸ This extensive description of the vine and its wine-making possibilities can be largely ascribed to the need of wine for sacramental purposes.

⁴⁹ Unidentified.

⁵⁰ Sic, meaning the Scriptures.

⁵¹ 'Pamplemousse' in the text, although this fruit did not grow in Siam. Bruguère is probably referring to the *som-o* ส้มโอ or pomelo.

⁵² The Siam Mission included Siam proper and the princely states farther north (old Lan Na and Nan). Penang was the only place in the peninsular area where French missionaries resided, although the bishop's jurisdiction extended theoretically all the way down the Malay peninsula and to Singapore.

⁵³ This is correct. The tree went by many names, including aquillaria and allagoch. These are actually the genus and species names for eagle wood, also called aloes wood (*Aquillaria agallocha*, in Thai *kritsana* กฤษณา, also called *trakhan* ตะขาศึก).

⁵⁴ The Thai term *kalam-pae* (*kalam-pae* seems to be a typographical error) refers to calambac, which the Thai claimed to be a product that was completely different from the product they called *kritsana* (aloes wood or eagle wood). The best-quality wood was obtained from the coast at Chanthaburi and from Cochinchina (Finlayson 1826: 258–60).

of the Cochinchinese king, who guards it carefully; only the kings and the greatest mandarins can obtain it. Several marvellous qualities are attributed to this tree; one, among others, seems too extraordinary to be true; you will doubtless consider it better to pass over it in silence. [92]

There are more fruit trees than in Europe, and varieties are more numerous, but the fruits they bear, with the exception of four or five, are not as good as ours. In general they have a tart or insipid taste. Some give off an unpleasant smell;⁵⁵ but we have the advantage of eating fresh fruit every day.⁵⁶

[PLANTS]

Among the plants worth mentioning are:

1. Banana or Indian fig. Its leaves are about eight feet long and two feet broad. Its fruit is oblong, slightly bent. It tastes like a fig. The fruit is healthful, but cold.

2. Sugar cane. This is like a reed, but its knots or rings are closer. It is whitish or violet. It has the taste and consistency of the maize stalk, more or less. The way the Siamese make sugar is very simple. They place two big trees perpendicularly which interlock; to one of these another tree is imbedded by means of which the whole contraption is turned. The canes are placed between the two trees, and the liquid which is produced falls into a press. It is then transferred to a copper pan, and after the liquid is boiled for some time the sugar alone remains.

3. Betel. This plant, which is greatly used in the Indies, is a kind of pale green ivy. The natives continually chew the leaf, after covering it with a thin layer of lime: the natives eat the lime and add sugar to the mortar. They fairly frequently also add a sliver of areca nut and a pinch of tobacco. Nothing is more disgusting than to see these people endlessly chewing the cud. Blood-coloured saliva dribbles from their mouths [93] and makes your heart miss a beat, but you have to be careful not to show this. This strange composition eats the tongue away and blackens the teeth. You can see every morning in Bangkok small boats filled with lime and betel; the Siamese fishwives invite passers-by to buy their merchandise, as in certain towns in France soft drinks sellers invite travellers to have a drink; to convince them, they partake themselves of their goods.

4. The boropet [*bòraphet* ต้นบรเพ็ชร or *Tinospora cordifolia*, one of many species of woody climber]. This plant grows in the air, so to speak. It hangs in the trees without adhering to them, without clinging tightly to them like ivy and other similar plants. Its roots are usually raised four feet above the earth. I have seen several species. I do not think they are to be found in Europe. The Siamese say this plant has many properties.

⁵⁵ He appears to be thinking of the durian.

⁵⁶ In contrast to Europe, where fruits are seasonal, limited largely to summer and autumn.

Kitchen garden plants and vegetables found in Europe do not grow well in the tropics. The stalk of the onion is like a thread. Cauliflowers are no bigger than apples. There are some fairly good small white smooth-skinned melons. But these people do not lack other vegetables which are entirely unknown to you. They have one with flowers at the top of the stalk and the seed hidden in the ground.

The Siamese have no cereals other than rice. They plant it in furrows in small square fields enclosed by a dyke. Water is fed into it and should remain there until the harvest; if there is no water after some time, the plant withers or does not yield. When the floods come, the fields around Bangkok are totally flooded for a fairly [94] long period of time; but the rice always rises above the water level and keeps pace with the rising waters of the river; if the water suddenly rises one metre, the rice rises likewise in 12 hours. Rice is very similar to oats in colour, the shape of its leaves, and its ears. To separate the grain from the husk, the ears are placed in a mortar, and are repeatedly beaten with a huge wooden pestle. Rice is the basic food for men and animals. Nothing can be simpler than the way the natives prepare it. They put the rice with a little water in an iron or terracotta cooking pot, and put the pot on the fire; as soon as the grains are somewhat swollen, they remove it and eat it at once, without condiments. Rice thus prepared is neither good nor bad; it has no taste. There are several varieties of rice. There is white rice, black rice, and some which can be grown and harvested in three months.

Also to be found in Siam is a kind of millet which is quite good.⁵⁷ The Siamese grow maize (Turkish wheat) too, but they do not do much with it; they just grill the seeds still on the cob, and eat it like bread. Wheat does not thrive; if sown, ants eat some and weevils consume the rest. The bishop tried growing some in a pond, to put it out of reach of this voracious insect, but the result was unsuccessful; one litre produced five ears, so the project was abandoned. Only rice is spared insects.

Poor Siamese are not greatly interested in flowers, but the big landowners, the mandarins and the princes decorate the galleries in front of their houses with them. There are not many varieties [95] but some plants have pleasant-smelling flowers; many are odourless. But, to make up for this, a great number of trees, especially those producing spices, give off a perfume which one can sometimes smell at sea more than a league off.

After talking to you about so many useful trees and plants, I should in justice say a word about those which are noxious. Do not be impatient, the list is not long; I shall only speak about two poisonous plants.

⁵⁷ Possibly *düai* ต้นเดือย, *Coix lachryma-jobi* (Job's tears), a cereal-producing grass.

1. The *mai-sac*.⁵⁸ This tree has leaves which poison the water of all the streams into which they fall. One has to be on one's guard of drinking instinctively from all the springs one finds. As for the rivers, the volume of water they maintain, which is continually renewed, nullifies the effect of the poison.

2. The *rangtang* [probably *rang-daeng* รวงแดง, *Ventilago calyculata*, a woody climber]. This is a poisonous plant found in the forests of Siam, mostly in the western part. The leaf is a little bigger than the vine, with bright red borders. The poison is in this border. If you touch it, you immediately experience an intolerable burning sensation. Your first desire is to go and plunge into water to extinguish the fire devouring you; but instead of finding anticipated relief, death awaits you. There is no remedy to cure the stricken person other than placing him on a wattle and lighting a fire beneath. When the red band of the leaf is cut off, its interior can be eaten without danger. When elephants see this plant, they pull it up very gingerly and throw it very far away; they know [96] their life depends on this. The king has had some of these leaves publicly displayed in Bangkok, so that everyone could recognize them and avoid the danger. One of our priests has seen this plant.

We have in our garden a tree called *mai-tourang*.⁵⁹ It has a fruit which has an unusual effect. If a few drops of the juice it contains fall on the skin, one scratches several days non-stop. Water only increases the itching. Only by applying mud on the place where the burning sensation is felt can there be some relief.

[THE PEOPLE]

Siam is a very fertile country, but under-populated and still more under-cultivated: it has ten times fewer inhabitants than France, on a similar sized land area. If one calculates the population by the number of births over ten years, compared with the number of deaths over the same period, a comparison I myself made in one of our settlements, it seems that the population declines by a ninth each year. So in less than a century Siam would be empty of people, if the great number of foreigners which commerce attracts, of whom many settle in the country, did not make good the deficit. Indeed, there are perhaps as many Chinese as true Siamese. The chief causes of this frightening reduction in population are 1. polygamy: the rich have many wives; the last king⁶⁰ had one thousand; 2. the great number of

⁵⁸This may be a reference to the sea-poison tree (*Barringtonia asiatica*), all parts of which are poisonous. Bruguière or his informant may be confusing this tree (called *don thale* ต้นโดนทะเล in Thai) with another mangrove tree called *pa-sak* (*Bruguiera conjugata* ต้นปะสัก), the Thai name of which sounds very like that of the teak tree (*mai sak* ต้นไม้สัก). The genus *Bruguiera* was named in honour of an eighteenth-century naturalist of that name at the University of Montpellier and is unrelated to our bishop.

⁵⁹ This tree (or perhaps a climber attached to the tree) may have been a member of the Urticaceae family, called *mai tarangtang* ไม้ตะรังตั้ง in Thai. The irritants that cause the itching are minute hairs on the surfaces of the leaves or pods.

⁶⁰ King Rama II, r.1809–1824.

talapoins; the number of these voluntary bachelors comprise a quarter of the men living in and around Bangkok; 3. the dirtiness of the inhabitants: they build their houses on a heap of mud, they live surrounded by pigs whose accumulated filth gives off a vile stench. They do not [97] know either how to build new channels to assist the runoff of rainwater, or how to clear those existing from the quantity of mud, leaves and grass which imperceptibly pile up in them. A European is shocked by such negligence, but they alone do not notice it; they are surprised at remarks that are made about the dangers of such excessive uncleanness. In general southern Asians are hardly clean, if I am allowed to judge by the individuals I have seen. This negligence, combined with the influence of the climate and the unhealthy foods the Siamese make much use of, results in a great number of illnesses, such as cholera, dysentery, pernicious fevers, intermittent fevers, scurf, ulcers, colic, and so many others it would take too long to list them. I hear talk of the dead or sick all the time. The Siamese are particularly subject to a kind of sickness they call *afflicted by wind*.⁶¹ You see people who seem perfectly well, suddenly afflicted by a syncope. It is very hard to bring them round. If the patient does not die in 24 hours, he is soon well again. I have been called many times at night to render Extreme Unction⁶² to persons attacked by this singular malady. The next morning I found men seated beside a big dish of rice and meat, eating with a healthy appetite.

All these causes one can attribute to their weak constitutions; they are much less strong than Europeans and the least exercise exhausts them. Chinese doctors can recognise a European from 100 Asians just by the movement of the artery; they have no need to take his pulse.

[TRADE]

[98] However fertile the kingdom of Siam might be, the inhabitants are none the richer; all the specie and commerce is in the hands of the king, the princes, the mandarins and the Chinese, for in this country the nobility does not lose rank by trading. The king and the princes have their vessels, their shops, their trade goods; some even have the right to establish monopolies. The chief export items are gold leaf, sugar, salt, cotton, some silk, indigo, a small quantity of pepper, rice, elephants' tusks, rhinoceros and unicorn horns, and dyes obtained from wood (they have one kind of wood [sappan] which produces a good purplish red).

Imports include dyed cotton cloth, porcelain and faience vases, ironmongery, some firearms. But these different objects must not be too precious or they would find no buyers.

⁶¹ *Pen lom* in Siamese.

⁶² One of the Catholic rites for the dying.

Only silver has currency in Siam; the coins are almost round, shaped like a button; the most highly denominated are worth only 3 francs; two are worth a piaster.⁶³ This silver is pure if it has not passed through the hands of counterfeiters. For things of little value, the Siamese exchange small shells.⁶⁴ Victuals here are very reasonably priced, but nothing is cheaper than bullocks. It is sometimes possible to buy one for a franc. They have become more expensive of late, because of the large number of vessels coming to Bangkok.

[ORIGINS]

It is time I spoke to you about the Siamese, having spoken so much about Siam. The inhabitants of the country are not called Siamese, but Thai, that is, *people pre-eminently free*.⁶⁵ If ever a name was inappropriate, [99] it is this. Every Siamese is born and dies a slave to the ruler and the high mandarins. After labouring all day on public works, they receive a little poor quality rice and some blows from a stick, but they are content with their lot and think everything is perfect in this country.

The origin of this people is not difficult to discover. According to a widespread tradition among them, the Siamese derive from a colony of Burmese who established themselves in Ligor. From there, these new settlers spread along the shores, went north, and founded Juthia [Ayutthaya], the former capital of the kingdom of Siam. Indeed the physique, religion, habits and customs are more or less the same among the Burmese and the Siamese, but the language is different.⁶⁶ Although these two peoples have a common origin, they are not friendly to each other, and indeed there exists considerable antipathy. The Burmese⁶⁷ have often ravaged Siam; last century they led away into captivity the [Siamese] king and all his family.⁶⁸ Our Christians suffered a lot from all these wars and revolutions. In tempestuous times the missionaries are their only resource and consolation. They

⁶³ Bruguière may be referring to the Spanish silver dollar, which weighed 26 grams, roughly twice the weight of the silver baht (about 15 g.).

⁶⁴ Cowries, which mostly came from the Maldives.

⁶⁵ Italics in the original. *The Chinese Repository* text of 1844 begins here. CR. 'The Siamese may with more propriety be said to be slaves of the king. Children are sold into slavery by their parents, wives are slaves of their husbands. The common people are liable to be called upon at any time by the local officers for their services, while the officers and nobility have made their knees and elbows callous by daily prostrations before his majesty, who may appropriately be termed the *master of a nation of slaves*.'

⁶⁶ So too, he might have added, are the scripts.

⁶⁷ CR. 'From the best authority it is pretty evident that the Siamese are the descendants of the Laos, whose spoken language strongly resembles the Siamese, and that the latter could not have existed as a distinct nation for more than four or five hundred years. But there is nothing in the written or spoken language to indicate that the Siamese were descendants of the Burmans.'

⁶⁸ After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

have to gather together those who have fled into the forests and lead them to a safe place. Slaves have to be bought back and often one has to buy one's own freedom, and rice has to be procured for everyone, even when there is insufficient to go round for oneself and without any assistance or human aid. In these untoward circumstances [one sees] the truth of the oracle of Jesus Christ: 'If the Holy Father feeds the small birds, he is still more likely to nourish you.' I could cite facts which prove how much divine providence takes care of those who are with God: [100] but it is not to a priest, and to a priest such as you, that proof is required to demonstrate the goodness of God to men.⁶⁹

[RELIGION]

Before talking about the customs and habits of the Siamese, I thought it appropriate to give you an idea of their religion. But I must urge you in advance to take courage, because one needs it to keep reading all the absurdities and extravagancies I am about to describe.

The talapoins who are like priests and doctors of religion, do not agree on several points. Most of them are unable to read the old religious texts so that each one assumes the right to add or delete some tenets. They invent fables which they present in public; they require to be believed on trust; but they find opponents among their brethren, resulting in disputes and even fights between them; this makes those witnessing the scene laugh at their expense. They still retain their authority and power over not just the people, but also the princes. I shall limit myself to relating the articles of their faith generally agreed among the Siamese; I shall give you firstly a summary of their doctrine and then explain each article in detail.⁷⁰

1. There are several gods: they are uncountable in number; several are married and they have children; the others are not married. The idols are the images of the divinity. The Christians call both the idols and the temples, containing them pagodas.

⁶⁹ CR. 'From the allusion to the disciples of the Romish faith, the reader would naturally gather a more favorable opinion of their pious self-denial and consistent life, than would be drawn from a personal observation of those of the same faith, now inhabiting the country: who are even in the estimation of the Siamese, proverbially indolent, filthy and licentious. It is a common report among the Siamese, that among the Romish priests in that country, the man who performs the marriage ceremony retains the bride for several days at his own house. And it is somewhat remarkable that among the boys, constituting one of their schools designated a college, is a youth, whose complexion and features bear a striking resemblance to those of the bishop.'

⁷⁰ What follows is a total travesty of what is supposed to be Buddhism. Bruguière's sources are not known, but must have included Monsignor Florens (the only other Frenchman in Bangkok) and the Siamese priests of the mission, among other informants.

2. There is, among them, one which is eternal and therefore exists, but it is not the most important [101] of the gods; another, which they call *Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau*,⁷¹ has more power, although he has been created; the first is called *Phra-Hin*.⁷²

3. Heaven and earth are eternal; they exist necessarily, but *Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau*, who is not eternal, who has been created, who was born and died on earth, created heaven and earth.

4. There are angels; they are not created.

5. All mankind derives from one man and one woman.

6. The soul is immortal (they have no concept of spirituality).

7. A heaven and hell exist. Heaven is above our heads, hell beneath our feet; there is fire there, but it is not eternal.

8. There are devils, but it is not known whence they come. These devils have a chief, who is to be found in the depths of hell; the others are his assistants. There are some on earth who torment reprobates.

9. There is a god who writes about men's actions, good and bad. He is called *Phra-Phum*.⁷³

10. The souls of the dead are individually judged.

11. Men can easily avoid hell, but not women. They can overcome this difficulty only by making considerable offerings to the talapoins. One has to understand that if their salvation depends on this condition, they will all be saved.[102]

12. All animals are our brothers. They were men before and will become such again; trees are animate.

13. There was once a flood in Siam; the god *Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau* placed a rainbow in the skies to reassure men who feared another flood.

⁷¹ The spelling today would be *Phra Phuttha Chao*, the Lord Buddha. There is a pedantic and inaccurate footnote in the text here, presumably not by Bruguière, indicating 'ph is not pronounced as f, but is an aspirated p: u becomes ou, so *Phra-phu-thi-chau* is pronounced as if one wrote *hpra hpour hti stchau*.'

⁷² It is impossible to make sense of Bruguière's description of the Siamese religion. He obviously fails to recognize the centrality of the Buddha. *Phra Hin* refers to *Phra In* (Indra), the king of the Hindu gods.

⁷³ The guardian spirit of the land. A Western equivalent is the *genius loci* or tutelary spirit of a particular place.

14. There will be a general resurrection; this world will end. Phra-Sian,⁷⁴ who has already come to the earth, will come a second time and make men eternally happy⁷⁵ (*Phra* means God, so Phra-Sian is the god Sian or the Messiah).

The ethics of the Siamese are reduced to these two points: give alms to the talapoins; kill no animals; the more a man eats, the more he obtains merit in the eyes of God.⁷⁶

I shall not speak to you about all the abominations they relate concerning their gods. I do not know them myself; I know only that a reasonable man cannot listen to these licentious tales without feeling considerable indignation without silencing the impudent narrator. This, though, is the subject of the discourses the talapoins deliver in public places to a large audience comprising people of all ages and sex. It is exactly the same religious base as with the Greeks and Romans. It is the same code of immorality in all times and in all places. The devil is always the same. But let us look at details.

In all eternity there existed a god called *Phra-Hin* [Indra พระอินทร์]; this god had a chicken. One day he wanted to try its strength; he collected some of the droppings of his chicken, and modelled two small dolls which he endowed with life. This was the first man and [103] the first woman, originators of the human race. The flood came soon afterwards.

The angels existing through all eternity undertook to control heaven and earth. They are not gods. They have a more perfect nature and much more power than men. They control everything and it does not seem that anyone has given them this function. Heaven is divided into 12 levels, concave in shape; these 12 heavens are supported by a high mountain called *Khau-Soumeng*.⁷⁷ The angels are scattered

⁷⁴ Phra Sian is Phra Si An (พระศรีอาริย์, from the Sanskrit *Śri Ariya*), the future Buddha and basis of some messianic beliefs. The term *phra* has several connotations, depending on context; it can be a generic term for sacred beings, divinities and gods. Contrary to Bruguière's understanding, it most often does not refer to a god.

⁷⁵ CR. 'In this summary of the religious creed of the Siamese, the bishop has given us some ideas which appear scarcely compatible with the Budhist [sic] system which they embrace. He states in the 6th article that they believe the soul immortal, whereas the consummation of their religious hopes is *annihilation*. He speaks of a general judgment, which appears scarcely in harmony with the usual belief of the Siamese that there is a *transmigration* of being from brute to man, and from man to superior being, and also the reverse according to the merit or the demerit of the individual. It may here be remarked that there is a want of uniformity in the religious opinions of the Siamese priesthood, and recently a number of more enlightened and leading members of this class rejected many of the absurdities of their books, and professed views more in harmony with reason and a pure religion; and it is to be hoped that the time may not be distant when instead of being the blind leaders of the blind, they may enjoy not only the enlightened influences, but the spiritual power of Christianity.'

⁷⁶ The last point seems more a reflection of Chinese merchants.

⁷⁷ Khao Sumen, Mount Meru (Sumeru).

among these 12 heavens. Some are white, some red. Some are also green. I believe there are none of any other colour. They are generally of colossal size. Crows and vultures are angels, because they eat human flesh; some claim that all the angels are white and very beautiful; take your choice.

In the middle of heaven is a large pool where the angels go to bathe. When there are too many of them, the pool cannot retain the water; it splashes over the sides and produces rain. Lighting has two causes: the first comes from an old woman who, to make fun of us, moves a mirror in the air; the second is caused by angels, who sometimes produce fire with their tinderbox; the spark produced causes lightning. Thunder is produced by a horrible giant who has established himself in the firmament. He has teeth like the tusks of a wild boar, and when he chastises his wife, he does so so loudly that he causes the earth to tremble and this is thunder. But he is not always satisfied with chastising, and sometimes chases after her with an axe in his hand. If when really worked up he drops his axe, this produces thunder.

Phra-Athit and Phra-Chan are the sun and the moon. These [104] two gods were men, and brothers. When they lived on earth they gave alms to the talapoins. The elder gave them every day a large amount of gold; the second gave silver. They had a younger brother, who also gave alms to the talapoins, but he gave them only rice in a very black receptacle. After their death, they became gods; the first is the sun, the second the moon; the third was less lucky. As punishment for his avarice, he was turned into an extremely black monster, with only arms, nails and ears. He is called *Phra-Rahu*.⁷⁸ This punishment did not improve him; jealous of his two brothers' good fortune, he waited for a long time for the opportunity of killing them. He often fights them, and this is the cause of eclipses. The Siamese, who dislike seeing their sun and moon being eaten, create a terrible noise to make Phra-Rahu stop. Throughout the eclipse, there is nothing but cries and shouts; drums are sounded, big bronze receptacles are repeatedly beaten, guns fired, the king has the cannons of the fort fired, the disorder is total. It would be easier to halt the eclipse than to disillusion them about this belief. They are cross with the Christians, because they remain unmoved: you Frenchmen, they say, do not like the stars which are so useful to you, since you do not trouble to come to their aid when they are in such great danger. They say it is not the earth which moves, but the sun: when it rises, it mounts an elephant; when it gets to its highest point above the horizon, that is, at midday, it changes its mount and sits on a buffalo or a horse (since I think I have heard of both). It goes down therefore on [105] one of these animals. At six in the evening it goes to hide behind Mount Meru, which I have already talked about.

⁷⁸ He is not a god but a demon, who, it was thought, tried to devour the sun or the moon during an eclipse.

It is not necessary for it to go under the earth, because no one lives there, and no one can live there as they could not stand on their feet. There are stars which are divinities; the immobile stars are set in the vault of heaven. Learned Siamese do not agree about the cause of this obscurity which can be seen on the moon; some say it is a big tree, some that it is an old woman removing husks of rice, others, *more scholarly*,⁷⁹ say it is a man busy making a basket.

The earth, air, sea, and rivers are so many gods. The earth is flat, a big buffalo upholds it with its horns, to prevent it falling into space, but, as no prop was given to the buffalo, the earth is not stable. The ebb and flow of the sea is caused by a huge crab; when it emerges from its cave, the water rises, and when it goes inside, the tide goes down. It is not just ordinary people who believe all these absurdities; there are plenty who say they are educated and who believe them, so it is not always wise to wish to undeceive them. To maintain in seriousness to a Siamese who has had no contact with Europeans that we have travelled over the earth and found neither buffalo nor elephant, that the sun is not a man, still less a god, that it is a million times bigger than the earth, that one can be protected against lightning strikes, that one can travel in the air⁸⁰ without being a bird, etc., is to take trouble to no purpose, for you would be treated as a charlatan. A British envoy⁸¹ and other persons have informed the king of Siam⁸² that the Europeans have discovered the means of [106] flying in the air, of sailing without sails or oars, using steam from water,⁸³ that they had invented air guns: the king told them he did not believe them.

The gods I have just told you about are visible gods, the others are invisible. The most famous and most important is Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau or Phra-Chau. I do not know in which century he was born, for he had a father and mother.⁸⁴ While he remained a man, he committed all sorts of crimes; he was called *Songmana Codom*,⁸⁵ that is, buffalo thief. Finally ashamed of his conduct, he wanted to become

⁷⁹ Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁰ Bruguère is probably referring to the still-novel flights in balloons. The very first such flight took place in France less than ten years before he was born.

⁸¹ This could be either John Crawford (in 1822) or Henry Burney (in 1826).

⁸² Either King Rama III (Phra Nang Klao, r. 1824–1851), before or after his accession, or his predecessor, King Rama II (Phra Phuttha Loet La Sisulalai, r. 1809–1824).

⁸³ Steam-powered ships were still a novelty. The first to appear in Burma was used five years earlier by the British forces, during the 1824–5 fighting against the Burmese along the Irrawaddy. The first to reach China arrived in 1830. Emperor Minh Mang's purchase of one in 1840 was rumoured to be for military use against Bangkok. None was to be seen in Bangkok for nearly fifteen years after this account was written, when the *Express* arrived (Bradley journal entry 11 January 1844).

⁸⁴ Bruguère possibly means that his parents were real people and therefore he must have been born in historic time.

⁸⁵ A corruption of the Buddha's personal name, Siddhartha Gautama; what immediately follows is sheer nonsense.

a god. To this end, he dressed in yellow and became a religious hermit. He soon had up to 500 disciples. Weary of always staying in the same temple, he started to travel; from the island of Ceylon, where he then was, he came in just one step to a mountain above Ayutthaya⁸⁶ (the distance between the two countries is 500 leagues). Overtaken by a rainstorm, he sheltered in a cave, which still exists; he left the mark of his body;⁸⁷ [and] he formed the order of talapoin monks. After collecting alms, he ate such a great quantity of pork that his stomach exploded, and the god was felled by a haemorrhage before changing his robes, which, in the eyes of the talapoins, is a certain sign of reprobation. They add that their god wanted to return to the island of Ceylon before dying. He left to his disciples his yellow robes. Anyone who dons them becomes a god,⁸⁸ and resumes being a man when he abandons them. When Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau died, he was annihilated; yet he was and remains a god, and is even the most powerful of the gods. Phra Hin, who exists by himself through all eternity, who created the father and mother of Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, has been forced to give way to him [107]. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, who is not eternal, created heaven and earth which are eternal; when he came into the world, the earth existed and yet he created it.⁸⁹ Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is in hell because he died wearing his yellow robe; he is not in hell, since he is a god. Indeed he is nowhere, because he has been annihilated. But the talapoins have his body, which was at first placed in a coffin. An indiscrete person who dared to come too close to the bier received a kick from the dead and annihilated god which was strong enough to kill him. Do you think that the talapoins agree on all these contradictions? But the facts are certain. A Siamese king was so shocked at this [last] article of their beliefs that he had it expunged from their religious texts, but it does not seem that they were much troubled in conforming to the monarch's orders. When they feel pressured by the Christians, they change their fire. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, they say, was born before heaven and earth existed: where then were his father and mother, they are asked, and where was he himself, since he had nowhere to go? - because according to their tenets nothing can exist in space without a base, a point of departure.

⁸⁶ Phra Phutthabat, the site of the Sacred Footprint in Saraburi Province. It is believed that the Buddha left an impression of his foot in a stone on this mountain during this visit.

⁸⁷ His foot, hence the modern name of the locality.

⁸⁸ Here, Bruguière reveals important weaknesses in his information-gathering and his attempts at logic. After concluding that the Thai term *phra* means a god, he fails to grasp that it has entirely different meanings in other contexts. In this instance, a man dons the yellow robes and becomes a *phra* (a bhikkhu or Buddhist monk), which Bruguière erroneously translates as 'a god'. He may also have misunderstood the purpose of the Thai noun-classifier *khon*, which is used for a layman but ceases to be used when a layman is ordained.

⁸⁹ By collapsing conflicting viewpoints of dogma, which he only half understood (and through a probably less than competent translator), the author does his best to emphasise apparent conflicts and absurdities which, in his opinion, are displayed by the religion he describes so inadequately.

Then they do not know what to reply, but say: 'This is how it is in our scriptures,' or they start to laugh and move to another topic. Those with some education feel the weak position of their religion; they make a point of not entering into a dispute with Christians. 'Do not discuss things with the Farangs' (meaning Christians) they say. 'for they will make so many objections, will ask you so many times why and where, that you will soon be reduced to keeping quiet.'

Everything belonging to Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is an object of veneration for the Siamese. From time to time the king of Siam sends a richly decorated vessel [108] to bring back a few relics of their supposed god; less than three years ago the last journey took place. The cave to which he withdrew, the fountain which gushes from it, and his footprint have become a place of pilgrimage for the Siamese.⁹⁰ The trace of this footprint is about five feet long, studded with precious stones and covered with a rich cloth. All around it small iron spikes have been built, on which pilgrims place rings and gold ornaments which are offered to the god. The king has stationed guards there so that no one will remove these offerings. On another mountain next to this one are shown to those interested the bed and a few small pieces of furniture which belonged to the god Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau; but we know what to think about these supposed objects of veneration. A long time after the death of this god, an impostor carved into the rock all these imprints of the foot and the body of Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau, and announced this marvel throughout the country; the Siamese are so superstitious that they took everything at face value. The talapoins in the neighbourhood profited in order to receive abundant alms. They then announced that they possessed the body of the god. They handed out to pilgrims monkeys' teeth which they said were the teeth of Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau; it is said that they still distribute some today. It is not difficult for the monks to deceive the Siamese; their word is taken on trust. They slaughtered a child on one occasion to remove the jewels he was wearing; they then placed the body next to an idol and smeared the blood of the victim on its mouth. They went to the king to accuse the idol of having eaten the child. The king believed them implicitly (gods cannot lie); the idol was condemned to having its mouth locked with a padlock and to be infamously called 'consumer of [109] men.' The deceit was finally discovered and the talapoins were punished with death, but the poor god nevertheless retained its name and its padlock.

⁹⁰ CR. 'This pretended footstep of Budha, a short distance from Ayuthia, and about one hundred miles north of Bangkok, is covered with a temple, and is made the place of an annual visit by the people from the capital and country, of all classes, high and low, priests and people; but it requires more than ordinary powers of imagination to discover any marks of deity, except the impress of His hands who hath made all things by his word.'

The two brothers of Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau followed him one after the other in the rank of head of the talapoins.

[THE TALAPOINS]

I am sure you are anxious to know about these singular persons, [and] I shall [now] satisfy you. I am constrained to use terms employed by the Catholic Church to indicate the rank and different grades of talapoins; I regret this, but cannot express myself otherwise. The talapoins constitute a kind of hierarchical religious order: they have a general, provincials,⁹¹ priors, ordinary religious, novices and postulants or disciples, and lastly scholarly and learned men. According to their rules, the ordinary talapoin must obey the temple head in everything. About four in the morning, they give the signal to warn the Siamese to prepare rice for them.⁹² At six o'clock, they go to collect alms. Devout Siamese, especially the women, wait in a respectful posture for the talapoins to pass, and give them rice, fruit, meat, cakes and sometimes money. They must accept everything, without thanks and even without acknowledgement; it seems they obey their rules on this matter. On returning to the pagoda, the talapoin who has sought alms bows at the feet of his superior, and makes his confession. The sins of talapoins are of a special order, for example, looking to one side, looking more than five cubits⁹³ ahead, returning a greeting, having inadvertently killed an insect. The confession over, the superior imposes an appropriate penance. They maintain, though, that to kill any animal, even inadvertently, without [110] transgression on one's part, is an unpardonable crime, but the contradiction does not trouble them.⁹⁴

When the talapoins have returned from alms gathering, the pagoda superior has the chapter enter the refectory. If the result of the collection is considerable, they stuff themselves with meat, and eat again at midday. The rest of the day is given over to games and sleep. From midday until the next morning, the talapoins can eat nothing, but scandal-mongers accuse them of having departed from the original law on this point, as with many others. Toward six in the evening, the gong is sounded to reassemble them; all the offices are indicated by the sound of a drum. Between six and nine o'clock, they recite a set form of prayer which lasts a good hour, and which almost none of them understand. It is said that it is not a true prayer, but a recital of the fabulous actions of their gods, some of which are less than edifying. In some pagodas, the talapoins pray every morning for a quarter of an hour; it is said that this practice is not long-established, [but] they wanted to copy the Christians. The talapoins wear yellow [robes]; they shave their heads and eyebrows twice

⁹¹ An ecclesiastical term for the head or chief of a province or of a religious order in a province.

⁹² Usually by sounding the temple gong.

⁹³ Approximately 30 cm.

⁹⁴ Sic. Between killing an insect and eating meat?

a month, the first and fifteenth days of the moon. According to their rules, they should not wear silk robes, should sleep on a plank, when they go out they should speak to no one, [but] have a fan in front of their eyes which limits their vision to five cubits' distance. A layman armed with a stout stick should always be at their side to beat them sharply if they derogate from one of their rules, but the king, who claims he is the supreme head of the religion, has dispensed them from observing these traditions, and the talapoins considered it inappropriate to protest against this innovation; the lay chastiser [111] accompanies them now only when they enter the king's palace. The talapoins can be considered the priests or ministers of the Siamese religion. They distribute to the people a kind of lustral water to which they attribute many properties; newly-weds have to present themselves before them to be sprinkled with this water. They have many rites which they have copied from the Christians; they have like us a Lent, an Easter, a pascal candle, a rosary, relics, [and] holy water. They write the names of their gods on a slip of paper which they wrap in cloth and attach small strips of cloth to. They give these supposed relics to the Siamese who are supposed to carry them with them at all times. They say they protect them against all kinds of misfortune or untoward events. They also have ordination.

The admission of laymen to the ranks of talapoins takes place at the beginning of their Lent, that is, in their ninth month,⁹⁵ corresponding to our July. Shortly before this the monarch carries in procession to certain pagodas areca nut [and] betel for the talapoins, strips of wood for cleaning their teeth, and lotus flowers for the new monks. The day established for their reception is usually the fifteenth of the lunar month. The monk-elect is positioned in a boat, with an old talapoin; the relatives of the monk-elect go with them, and also bystanders. The procession goes to the pagoda to the sound of instruments. Licentious songs are sung in honour of the gods, but in a language that, happily, the participants do not understand.⁹⁶ On arrival at the pagoda, the postulant is led into the ceremonial hall; the superior comes to sit down on a mat or a carpet, rather like a tailor; with one hand he holds a fan which conceals [112] part of his face, and in the other hand he holds a gilded wooden mallet. The postulant prostrates himself before the superior, having his relatives at his side; one carries an empty bowl, another a fan, a third a length of yellow cloth. The participants are seated in a similar fashion, forming a semi-circle. After the first customary questions, the superior asks the postulant, 'What was your

⁹⁵ Bruguère is in error. The rainy-season retreat, which he calls Lent, begins on the full-moon day of the eighth Thai month (Ashada in the Buddhist calendar). In the year he was writing, that day happened to be 15 July 1829, but it can also occur in June.

⁹⁶ The chants being in Pali, neither could the author understand; so to castigate them as 'licentious' is entirely unjustified.

conduct like in the world? Are you married? Are you a debtor? Do your creditors agree to your entering the pagoda? And your relatives also agree?’ He finishes by having him pledge to reject absolutely the worldly dress he is wearing (he is dressed in white), and to don the yellow robe which will make him a god. Immediately the postulant is undressed, and clothed in a yellow robe; a fan and a bowl are placed in his hands. Henceforth he is called *Phra* (God);⁹⁷ he is worshipped, and also has the right to seek alms. The talapoins acknowledge no one, not even monarchs, but mere individuals should salute them, or rather adore them, because they are called gods. The way to greet them consists of joining one’s hands and raising them to the forehead; those in a hurry turn to one side and place their hands behind their ears;⁹⁸ most do nothing. These strange divinities do not hold appointment for life; their dress makes them gods, and if they discard it or if it is removed from them by force, they become men again. A talapoin who has taken the vows should stay at least three months in the pagoda; after this period he can abandon his condition and resume it at will.⁹⁹ To advance in rank, a talapoin should resume lay dress and

⁹⁷ Much of Bruguière’s incomprehension of Buddhism derives from incorrectly understanding the meaning of *phra*, which in this context means a Buddhist monk or bhikkhu.

⁹⁸ This appears to be describing the behaviour of the bhikkhus themselves.

⁹⁹ CR. ‘The wats (what are here called pagodas) consist of a temple, or temples, containing images, and are surrounded by pagodas and dwelling-houses for the priests, and constitute the only school-houses and college for Siamese youth, and the priests are their only professors and teachers. It is customary for boys of all classes to enter these wats to learn to read, and as the language is simple, a few months are sufficient for them to learn to repeat the sounds found in a Siamese book, but many close their studies without learning to read intelligently, though this constitutes with them the sum of an education. Thus every Siamese boy is taught not only to preserve the yellow cloth, but actually to wear it himself, but though they shave the head, and wear the yellow cloth while in this capacity as novitiates, they have nothing to do with the duties of the priesthood more than to carry the rice pots and row the boats of the priests, as they pass from house to house to gather their daily food. The priests eat in the morning and take nothing after 12 o’clock, but a cup of tea; a supply of betel nut furnishes an occasion for an unceasing demand upon their powers of mastication. Every morning before sunrise the priests are out, each with a large iron pot or kettle for receiving their rice which has been boiled by the women of the respective families, and by them or their children is dealt out by a small ladle full to each priest as they pass in silence, while the donor adds to the gift an expression of reverence by folding the hands and raising them to the forehead. The king and his nobles thus with their own hands deal out rice to the priests. It is stated of one of the high ministers of state, that he had an African slave, who for some misconduct had by his master been promised a flogging. But the slave went and had his head shaved, and put on the yellow cloth, and the next morning passed before his master with his rice pot, and received from him a portion of this bounty and his salam. At certain season of the year, and on festival occasions, they receive from the king and his subjects yellow cloth of cotton and crape. They receive also from government an allowance in money of from two to six ticals per month, according to their rank and station. Their number at the capital is estimated at twenty thousand.’

enter the pagoda a second time.¹⁰⁰ The talapoins can take orders only at the age of 20; before that, they are novices. The provincial, who has among them the same authority as bishops in the Catholic Church, [113] has two assistants and exercises his authority over a certain number of pagodas. It is said that when he dies, a council is held, a layman appointed by the king presides, he gathers the votes and chooses the person he thinks best to fill the vacant post. The supreme patriarch,¹⁰¹ who is the head of all the talapoins, has at the same time jurisdiction over all the pagodas in Siam. He has four assistants; on his death, the king chooses his successor from among these four.

The talapoins live in the pagodas and are lodged in a house contiguous with the temple. The pagodas of important persons are distinguished from the others by large columns¹⁰² erected in front of the temple (I shall explain below what these columns signify).

The talapoins are the trustees of religion among the Siamese and the Burmese.¹⁰³ They speak Pali when they understand it. It is the Latin of the Siamese; this language is mostly composed of Malabar¹⁰⁴ and Cambodian words; it also includes some Malay and Siamese terms.¹⁰⁵ Religious books are written in this language. Their books have a strange shape; they are thin strips of branches or leaves of a palm the Siamese call *ton-tan*, eight to ten inches long by an inch and a half wide; they incise on these leaves some characters which they blacken to make them clearer; these books and characters greatly resemble those used in Sanskrit, though they are not the same.

¹⁰⁰ This sentence seems to mean the transition from the novitiate to monkhood, and not a second ordination in the monkhood.

¹⁰¹ 'General' in the text, as with the Jesuit order.

¹⁰² Presumably stupa.

¹⁰³ CR. 'The bishop is very safe in stating that the Siamese priests 'speak Pali when they understand it'. This is unfortunately very seldom the case, and then it is used in the recital of prayers rather than in conversation. The statement that the 'Pali is composed mainly of Malabar and Cambojan, with some words of Malay' is rather hypothetical. Much is said in this connection about the analogy between the Siamese and Roman Catholic religion, but if the disciples of the latter find any cause of exultation in this resemblance, they must yield to the former the merit of originality, while the Catholics have here as in other countries labored to conform their customs to the prejudices and usages of the nations where they may chance to be. They have in Siam carried the principle of conformity to such an extent, as to render it extremely difficult in some cases to draw the line of distinction between their forms and those of pagan worship. 'Lent and Easter' when applied to the Siamese religion are merely terms used for accommodation.'

¹⁰⁴ On the southwest coast of India. This is far from the truth. Bruguère may have heard the Thai term *makhot* (another name for the Pali language) and may have mistaken it for 'Malabar'.

¹⁰⁵ The vocabulary largely derives from Sanskrit, which language is mentioned a few lines later.

The talapoins, as I have already mentioned, have a Lent, but this is not a time of mortification for them. It begins in July and ends in November.¹⁰⁶ They preach in their pagodas and elsewhere in this period; they invite the Siamese, by sounding [114] their drums, to come and listen to them. At a pre-designated time, a young talapoin appears carrying a large receptacle containing a religious text wrapped in a precious cloth. The preacher follows this silently and mounts a pulpit erected outside the pagoda; those present, humbly prostrated, listen avidly to the narration of revolting absurdity mixed with obscene anecdotes,¹⁰⁷ often invented by the talapoins themselves. At the end of the sermon, they are careful to warn those present that the person who would give particular dishes, seasoned in such and such a manner, to the preacher would acquire much merit. The person giving this or that stew would have much less; the preacher always dislikes stew. The talapoin, after finishing his sermon, takes away with him baskets filled with meat, fruit, cakes, and candles, to which are attached several coins. Rich people invite the talapoins to come and preach in their houses and present the same offerings. Throughout their Lent, they can preach every day and eat wherever they are invited; for the rest of the year they preach only on the eighth and fifteenth days of the lunar month. Their Easter, which they call *Passa*,¹⁰⁸ almost always falls in November. At this time, the king accompanied by his entire family and the great lords of the court, goes to visit the most important temples and offers new robes to the talapoins. This is truly a magnificent spectacle, the combination of richly decorated state barges bedecked with flags; some of the barges are gilded, others are painted in different colours; the cries of the oarsmen mingle with the sound of instruments; the palace guards and the soldiers accompanying the monarch, all seem to slide over the surface of the water so swiftly that one has difficulty in focusing on the spectacle. But how one's [115] heart is touched when one reflects that this ostentatious show is destined to honour the devil and his acolytes! The white elephant, monkey, horse, and white rat are invited to the ceremony; it is like a festival of albino animals. The people in their turn go to visit the pagodas; processions are everywhere; [there is] shouting [and] terrible tumult on all sides, [with] people singing [and] laughing. On arriving at the pagoda, people scarcely worry about the gods; they have not come there to pray to them or to offer sacrifices. People spend their entire time eating and drinking

¹⁰⁶ More usually October; during the decade prior to the 1829 essay, it *always* ended in October.

¹⁰⁷ The author clearly understood these no more than the 'licentious songs' above.

¹⁰⁸ Bruguière should have used the term *òk phansa* for the end of the three-month period of the rainy-season retreat (*phansa*, which he earlier calls 'Lent'). Here he is referring to the royal *kathin*-cloth ceremonies, which take place within a month after the retreat ends. They took place from about mid-October to mid-November when Bruguière was in Bangkok. Having equated the retreat-period with Christian Lent, he is equating the ceremonies following Lent with 'Easter'.

and veritable orgies occur which last for whole nights on end. Thus is sanctified, for a month, their Easter.

Although the Siamese give out that it is not permitted to catch fish, they commit this supposed crime on a daily basis. To appease the river god, who is extremely irritated by these daily murders and has many other causes for complaint, such as tipping rubbish into the river, hitting the water when rowing, etc.; to appease it, as I said, they make offerings to it. They give it fruit, eggs, rice, areca, betel, candles; they invite it to overlook its vexation and to eat to its full the food offered. This last ceremony takes place at the same time as the other one.

The talapoins outwardly appear as strictly observing the rule of their religion which forbids the killing of animals. Catching fish near their temples is not allowed; they chase away and stone any fishermen they meet. Their establishments are general hospices which shelter all kinds of animals: monkeys, pigs, chickens, crows, and pigeons are found there in great number. It is said that this exposes them to great temptations, and more than [116] once they have violated the right of hospitality to the point of slaughtering their guests and even eating them. In addition to the animals the Siamese place in their pagodas to ensure they do not die, the talapoins feed others out of charity, they say, to their relatives who have become dogs, cats, monkeys or birds. Unfortunately these animals do not always show their gratitude; more than once they have eaten their foster fathers. Some time back an enormous tiger was caught in Siam; the poor beast ran the risk of dying because of its known misdeeds in the neighbourhood. The talapoins went in a group to plead for its pardon. The governor, pestered by their repeated solicitations, granted their request, though reluctantly. But the fierce beast did not show himself grateful to his rescuers. The first thing he did in his liberty was to carry off a talapoin whom he ate in the nearby jungle.

The talapoins exercise no jurisdiction over the Siamese, unless invited by the king or individuals; they bless houses if asked; they go to visit the sick to teach them, they say, the way to heaven. When they enter a house they are worshipped and their feet are washed; those who perform this rite carry out a very meritorious act. After that, the idol which every family always has is brought into the bedroom of the sick person; the talapoin performs in front of this statue a great number of superstitious ceremonies. He forces the sick person to say with him *Hora-hang! Hora-hang!* which is the name of one of one their gods.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Possibly *arahan*, meaning ‘disciple’? Whatever, a further example, if needed, of Bruguière’s incomprehension.

If the talapoin is invited to a funeral, he is placed in the same barge as the dead person, and reads a book during the journey. When they arrive at the [117] place set aside for burning the dead, the talapoin removes as gently as possible the sheet covering the coffin, being afraid the dead person would notice and cause him to die. The talapoin receives as payment the winding sheet and other rewards.

Every year during the flood period, the king sends a delegation of talapoins to order the waters to recede. Being prudent, they select the moment when the flood begins to diminish. They were not so lucky when they went to the port of Bangkok to exorcise the Asiatic cholera;¹¹⁰ they all caught the disease, and several died while performing their diabolic ceremonies.

This is what they teach concerning their condition: to be a talapoin is a meritorious action, to be so for a long time still better, but to be a talapoin until dying is a great sin; if you die wearing the yellow robe, even if you did not have time to doff it, you are infallibly damned. The robe goes to hell where it is hung on a big iron bar, which breaks seven times a day, as so many yellow robes are hung on it.

Nothing exceeds the delirious veneration of the Siamese for members of this sect. They scorn them and worship them. Sometimes after the death of a talapoin, they fight over the body. As no one intends to give way, they position a boat in the middle of the river, in which the corpse is placed. They attach two other boats to the first one. Each side rows in a different direction, and the side where the rope, linking it to the boat with the dead person, snaps is beaten. The other takes the corpse away in triumph and burns it.

The king himself is entirely loyal to them, although he is forced to agree that the conduct of his gods is extremely scandalous (these are his own words). [118] He feeds 350 every day; he gives them everything he can find that is exquisite, while his soldiers die of hunger, if I can so express myself. Where he is offered some fruits or preserves, he does not eat them, but sends them to the talapoins, offering them with his own hands. No food is forbidden to the talapoins; they eat meat, provided they have not killed the animal, even though it has become proverbial among them that anyone who kills has sinned, and he who eats it will suffer the consequences. They teach that their merit, and that of alms-givers, increases in proportion with the quantity of food the talapoins take. So they gorge on meat to acquire this alleged merit. Heads of the pagodas can be seen, after consuming a bushel of rice, fruits and pork, having their stomachs compressed by their disciples, in order to be able to eat still more. A reasonable person would never believe that such naked gluttony would be raised to one of the primary virtues, if he did not witness it himself. What is still more unbelievable is the unquestioning attitude of these unbelievers who give no other proof of the divinity of their talapoins than their insatiable voracity. How, a

¹¹⁰ Presumably during the May 1820 epidemic.

Siamese said to me when I was exposing the ridiculous beliefs of his religion, how could our talapoins not be gods, since they eat so much?

We have talapoin nuns as well as talapoin monks. Our description of them will be shorter, and above all less tiresome. They are mostly old widows who do not know what to do, and retreat into a convent they call *Haran*.¹¹¹ They are dressed in white, and should recite a kind of rosary, but this is [119] not difficult. They can chat with their neighbours, and even amuse themselves, providing the rosary beads remain in their hands. They are not goddesses, but have the right to seek alms, but they do not enjoy the same consideration by far as their brothers the talapoins. The people call them *chi*¹¹² meaning persons in the pagoda. Their houses are near the temples, but outside the temple enclosure. There are not many of them; when they pray, they have to turn their backs on each other.

[MORE ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS]

After Pra-Phu-Thi-Chau, the god with the greatest reputation is Phra-Sian, meaning God Messiah.¹¹³ This god was born near Juthia, in a hamlet with this name. He has no father, and his mother died many centuries ago. In his youth, Phra-Sian was most disobedient. His mother forbade him going to fish, but he always had his fishing line in his hands. She urged him to become a talapoin, but the god consistently refused to do so. Finally Phra-Sian suddenly changed for the better his sinful life and became a talapoin. Although he had never studied, he knew, instinctively, how to speak Pali. He became so wise in religious doctrine that no learned man could be compared to him; after his death he became a god. His fellow talapoins put up a golden statue of him, but its head could never be attached to the body. The talapoins were very embarrassed, when, to their great surprise, the real head of the god, whose body had not yet been burnt, came and positioned itself on the statue. The Siamese claim to possess this statue even now. Phra-Sian should be born again to make the universe happy; the period is not determined. The talapoins say that extraordinary signs in the sky and on earth will inform men that his second coming is near. They say that the world [120] as it exists today should come to an end. Before this fatal catastrophe there will be huge wars, men will massacre each other, they will become much smaller, and will be mere pygmies as big as dolls; they would need a hook and perhaps a ladder to collect vegetables in their gardens. Before the

¹¹¹ This should be *aram*, meaning everything within the monastery enclosure, both grounds and buildings.

¹¹² Spelt *xi* in the text. 'Nun' would be a better translation, but Bruguière presumably does not want to appear to sacralize the Siamese equivalents.

¹¹³ As indicated earlier, Phra Si An (a shortened Thai form of the name Sri Ariya Mettraiya ศรีอริยมตไตรย) is the future Buddha, whose era will begin after the end of the 5,000 years of the present era.

end of the world there will be two suns, then three, then more, up to seven. When the second sun appears, the streams will dry up; the rivers and probably the seas will dry up later. Plants and trees will wilt in turn. When the earth is completely denuded of grass and plants, the animals will die, and men will die after the animals; in the end, when the last sun appears, the whole universe will be reduced to ashes. Then Phra-Sian will come down from the heavens, will revive all mankind, and the land will be transformed into a delicious garden. There will be no more calamities in the world, no more worries, no more sickness, no hell. Men will be immortal and will enjoy peace, happiness, and eternal felicity, uniquely occupied in contemplation of the august face of Phra-Sian. To hasten the coming of this god-deliverer, abundant alms must be given to the talapoins.

Phra-Thumalai [Phra Malai พระมาลัย] is a god who has the power to retrieve souls from hell; when he descends, the flames in the abyss are extinguished. Reprobates continually address their prayers to him.

Phra-That Xulamuni [Phra That Chulamani พระธาตุจุฬามณี]. This god resides above the twelve heavens inhabited by angels. He is huge and looks like a green column.¹¹⁴ All men who die after living justly go to him and worship him [121]. They are well received if they add to the merit of their good deeds a water lily. After having spent some time in heaven, these happy souls will obtain permission to return to earth; they will be reborn as great lords, princes, kings, and even talapoins. Then they start again. In this way someone who has been to heaven could return to hell, and vice-versa.

Phra-Vet-Somdon¹¹⁵ was at first a bird; he subsequently became a snake, an ant, and then was metamorphosed into all kinds of animals; in the end he became a man and a great lord. Disgusted by his wealth, he wanted to be a hermit, a recluse. He gave all his wealth to the poor, died, and was added to the number of gods. The Siamese relate about this god terrible tales concerning opposition to purity. The talapoins like to relate terrible stories in their sermons about Phra-Vet-Somdon, because they are sure of attracting many listeners.

Phra-Phum is the busiest god. He is required to enter into a big book all the actions of men, both good and bad. Charitable Siamese build in front of their houses small chapels to protect Phra-Phum from the elements. Here I end the catalogue of Siamese divinities. I should never end if I wanted to say something about each of their gods.

¹¹⁴ As elsewhere, Bruguière has misunderstood the meaning of *phra*, which in this context refers to both a holy relic (*phra that*) and the Chulamani stupa, which enshrines it.

¹¹⁵ This should be Phra Wet Sandòn พระเวสสันดร, the Thai pronunciation of Vessantara, the prince who was the tenth and last incarnation of the Buddha.

The monarch of the demons is Phaja-Jom [Phraya Yommaban พระยายมบาล]. He is both the king of hell and the judge of the souls of the dead. He holds his sessions four times a month, on the first, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-first lunar days. Phra-Phun [Phum?] brings his book and according to what is in it, the guilty person is punished to a greater or lesser extent. The carrying-out of the sentence is the right of the Jom-Phra-Ban [*yommaban* ยมบาล]. These are [122] terrible giants; their faces are loathsome; from their mouth protrude long pointed teeth like those of a wild boar. Their job is to guard the gates of hell, and to go on earth to take the souls of the dead and torment reprobates. Here is a short form of the penal code of Phaja-Jom. All the reprobates are cast into a huge lake of fire and sulphur. This punishment is the same for all the damned, but there are some special ones, differing according to the crimes committed. For example, the soul of someone who has used a fishing line is suspended by his throat with a large fishhook and hung up like a fish. The soul of someone who has killed a pig has his head cut off and his stomach eviscerated. The mouth of the soul of talapoin who has eaten outside permitted hours is opened with two hooks, and he is forced to swallow molten copper.¹¹⁶ For some crimes, the soul is impaled on a young tree. The tree grows and thrives, and the guilty soul remains ever in the same condition until the tree dies and decays. Please note that this tree is planted in the middle of hell, and thrives, in consequence, in the midst of fires and flames of this place of torture. Someone who steals from a temple or who deposits filth nearby will be turned into a monster whose stomach is as big as the kingdom of Siam; his mouth will be as small as the eye of a needle. Someone who sleeps in a pagoda will be turned into a toad; lastly, someone who slumbers while a talapoin preaches will be changed into a big earthworm. After enduring these torments for several centuries, the souls of the reprobates will enter the body of an animal. When this animal dies, the soul passes into the body of a different kind of animal, until reaching an elephant or a monkey. Finally, the soul will become a human [123] again. We have a woman in Bangkok who publicly says, like Pythagoras,¹¹⁷ that she recalls three metamorphoses before being reborn as a human.

It is from this false belief that animals are our brothers that the interdiction of killing them arises. Devout Siamese buy fish still alive and release them into the river. They offer, as I have said above already, pigs and other animals to be fed in the pagodas until they die a natural death. So the Siamese spend money on preserving the life of an animal, and provide it with shelter, but they will never think of founding a hospital to alleviate their sick brethren. Animals are their fellow creatures. Such is mankind when deprived of the light of the true religion!

¹¹⁶ CR. 'These penalites are as seldom inflicted as the threatened consequences attend the following crimes.'

¹¹⁷ The Greek philosopher and mathematician of the sixth century BC.

To prove the extent to which it is criminal to kill an animal, even inadvertently, their learned men tell the following story. Formerly there lived a hermit who was very devoted to the talapoins. He gave such abundant alms, that just with the water in which the rice to give to the talapoins was cooked, was formed a river deep enough to receive rated¹¹⁸ ships. One day, when washing his beard, he accidentally killed a small fish that was in the water. He thought he had nothing to fear by this involuntary accident. He made a mistake. He died and went to hell. He was extremely surprised to see himself so cruelly frustrated in his hopes. ‘What!’ he said, ‘Can one without committing injustice refuse a little rice to someone who, throughout his life, gave so much to the talapoins?’ ‘It is true,’ he was told, ‘that you have carried out very many good [124] actions, but you have lost all the merit [gained] by inadvertently killing a small fish. Look,’ they said, to console him, ‘at that high mountain, the peak of which is lost in the clouds. Every 100,000 years, two angels will come and gently sweep the peak with a very delicate cloth; after this is done and when the mountain is reduced to the level of the plain, you will leave here.’ In spite of this fearsome sentence, the Siamese are not more cautious: they kill and eat animals like other nations.¹¹⁹ I was travelling with a Siamese who stubbornly maintained that men and animals are brothers. He made no objections though to killing pitilessly the chickens he came across. I remarked that his actions belied his beliefs. ‘If it is true,’ I said to him ‘according to your principles, that this chicken is your sister, you are committing a terrible crime in killing and eating one of your relatives.’ ‘All right,’ he replied, ‘I am excused in good faith; I am guiltless until she shows me a certificate of affinity.’

Although the interdiction of killing animals is general, the Siamese do not hold all in equal esteem and affection. They have a horror of dogs, I know not why. One would bring disgrace on oneself if one caressed a dog in front of a Siamese. Newly arrived missionaries in Siam have to watch themselves carefully on this subject, for fear of shocking the gentiles. But, on the contrary, they like cats a lot, because they kill rats that eat the talapoins’ books. Crows and vultures are highly esteemed; the hare is considered here to be very wily and resourceful. It has all the cunning the ancients and moderns attributed to the fox. [125] But nothing equals the veneration of the Siamese for the white elephants. The king should have at least one. It is like a palladium, the fate of which is linked to the monarch’s life and the prosperity of the country. If the elephant dies, the king loses all the merit he acquired by feeding it, and should even die in the year following the elephant’s death.¹²⁰ This

¹¹⁸ In the sense of taxable.

¹¹⁹ CR. ‘The crime consists not so much in eating as in killing the animal, hence the priests excuse themselves for eating flesh by saying that others killed it.’

¹²⁰ In Bruguière’s time, this belief was probably reinforced by the fact that two of the white elephants died in June 1824, and King Rama II died in July 1824 after a short illness.

apprehension leads to the extraordinary care attached to the elephant's health. The white elephant has the title of Chao-Phya, which title corresponds to the grandees of the first rank of Spaniards. It comes immediately after the princes of the blood. People are severely punished if it is called by its own name. It lives in a kind of palace, has a huge court, officers, guards, [and] valets. It wears a sort of diadem on its head; its tusks are decorated with several gold rings; it is served on golden or silver-gilt plates; it is fed with sugar cane and other delicious fruits. When it goes to bathe, a large retinue accompanies it. One of the guards beats rhythmically on a copper drum, and another spreads over its head a big red umbrella, an honour reserved for the grandees. Its officers cannot withdraw without bowing deeply to it. When it is sick, one of the court doctors has to treat it; the talapoins pay it visits and recite many prayers for its well-being, sprinkling it with their lustral water. In spite of all their attentions, the white elephant is often bad tempered and more than once would have killed all the talapoins if they had not taken care to put themselves as a distance, out of reach of the tusks and trunk of his lordship. The one held at present is very unruly and had to have its tusks cut. Every evening there is a large [126] concert given at the elephant's quarters, governed by the etiquette of His Excellency, who should fall asleep only to the sound of musical instruments.

When a white elephant dies, the king and the court are profoundly afflicted. Its body is honoured with the funerary pomp appropriate to the rank it held when living. It is said that the white elephant sometimes holds public audiences and is given presents; if it accepts them, it is an infallible sign that the donor has much merit; if it disdains them, it is proof that the heavens are displeased with him. I cannot vouch for the veracity of this last circumstance. A person who can capture one of these animals is exempt, he and all his descendants, from any taxes or corvée work. It is very difficult to account for such extravagant veneration of this animal. I think I have seen somewhere that the old kings of Siam said they were descended from a white elephant. Some Siamese think otherwise, saying that the soul of a dead king enters the body of a [white] elephant. This second opinion is not in complete opposition to the first. Others say they do not know, and I join their ranks, waiting for more detailed information.

The white monkey enjoys almost the same privileges as the elephant. It is a Phaya, has access to the court, and officers coming under it, but has to give way before the Phaya elephant. The Siamese say that the monkey is a man, not very handsome, it is true, but so what, it is nonetheless our brother. If it does not speak, it is through prudence; it is afraid the king would press it into his service without paying it any salary. It would seem that formerly it spoke and it was sent as supreme commander to fight, if I am not mistaken [127], an army of giants; with a kick he

split a mountain in two. They say he concluded this war honourably.¹²¹ I do not know if its early bravery has entitled it to the King of Siam's benevolence.

The Siamese have more respect for white animals than those of another colour. I have been told that when a talapoin meets a white cock, he salutes it, but he does not pay the same honour to a prince. I have never seen that. It is also forbidden to Siamese, on pain of damnation, to break an egg. They say that eggs are animate; if they want to eat some, they get someone else to break them. Usually it is the Malays or the Chinese who perform this service. According to the Siamese, trees and plants also have a soul; this puts then in the cruel dilemma of dying of hunger or being damned; they have a marked predilection for the poplar,¹²² and place it in front of their pagodas; those brought from Ceylon benefit from the greatest consideration. When a talapoin wants to cut down a tree, he sends one of his disciples to give it the first blows from the axe, that is, to kill it, and when the tree has been killed, the talapoins finish the operation themselves.

This cult and consideration for animals and plants leads to the practice among the Siamese to take their names; one person is called a dog, another a cat; we have a prince elephant, a prince tiger, a lord pomegranate.¹²³ We have had a princess of the golden hoof and many other names that are hardly better.

My digression about Siamese metempsychosis has caused me to lose sight of Phaya-Jom and its satellites. When a man is dying, Jom-Phraban, an envoy of hell, goes onto the roof to seize the soul as [128] it goes off. On another side three bulldogs which had belonged to a reprobate come to help the soul; these dogs are called Phuto, Tamo and Sangko. If they think they are not strong enough, they call up an angel, and a great struggle takes place, with the fate of the soul depending on the result; the victor carries off the soul. Some Siamese allege that it is Phra-Sian who takes this soul and then makes him go around the world; he then makes him cross a bridge strung over the abyss. Scarcely has the soul appeared than a big bulldog leaps out to eat it. If the soul shows it is fearless, its salvation is assured, and it goes at once to heaven. If, on the other hand, it is struck with fear, it loses its balance and falls into hell. Not all Siamese agree on this point; it would seem that they have taken this article of their beliefs from the Muslims.

Independently of the devils in hell, the Siamese acknowledge another kind of devils which exist in the air, which they call *Phi*.¹²⁴ They say these are demons

¹²¹ There are echoes here of elements of the *Ramayana*.

¹²² Presumably meaning the *bo* tree, the Indian fig.

¹²³ Three of these names may refer to princes (*phra ong chao chai*) who were sons of the Front Palace Princes in the First and Second Reigns: Chang ('elephant'), born 1781/2; Súa ('tiger'), born 1806/7; and Thapthim ('pomegranate'), born 1808/9. The Front Palace Prince himself, at the time of writing, had the childhood nickname Phra-ong Chang (literally 'Prince Elephant').

¹²⁴ Ghosts or evil spirits.

which cause harm to men and sometimes appear in horrible forms. They blame these evil spirits for all the calamities which occur in this world. If a mother loses her child, Phi caused this bad luck; if a sick person is in despair, Phi is the cause. To assuage him, they invoke him and make offerings to him, which are strung up in deserted spots. They do not believe that these spirits are gods, but they say they are very powerful and it is better to treat them with circumspection. They often offer them cakes, coconuts, rice, [and] betel. They are convinced that these aerial gods come to smell these offerings. When travelling I have come across some of these [129] offerings hung up in the branches of trees. I asked my guide what these baskets were for. He replied, without guile, that they were gifts to Phi. The Siamese think that contagious illnesses, like the plague and Asiatic cholera, are living things, demons. They exorcise them and chase them out of the city; some people run after them with a dagger in their hands; they call that killing the plague. Among the Siamese can be found a good number of persons perverse enough to pray to the demons to harm their enemies. Every kind of superstition is practised in Siam: spells, charms, curses, philtres, conjuring up the dead; in a word all the dreadful secrets of black magic are set in motion when no other means to arrive at one's goal are available, and all that is done with the help of these devils they call Phi. These diabolical activities produce such extraordinary effects that it is impossible to explain them naturally. The apparitions of the devil occur so frequently and in such a public manner that it would be unfair if one continued to deny it. It would be necessary to accuse of imposture the vicars apostolic and the missionaries who can bear witness to having not only seen with their own eyes the acts of the devil,¹²⁵ but also of having examined them with all the attention an educated and cautious person is capable of. Because these marvels rarely occur in Europe, one should not conclude that it is the same in Asia. Europe is entirely Christian, whereas most of Asia is still under the sway of the devil.

Whatever the case, there should always be a proportional relationship between cause and effect. Just the sign of the [130] cross, a few drops of holy water, the mere presence of a Christian who happens to pass, makes all the actions of the enchanter void, is enough to make all the spectres flee, and nullify the skills of the magicians. Did God institute the sign of the cross to prevent a natural and necessary cause from producing the intended effect by the Creator? These, they say, are the secrets of the physical. But can one believe in good faith that a Siamese is a more skilled physicist than all the members of European academies? Without doubt, no. But enough of this subject; I am even afraid of having said too much. You Frenchmen, you do not believe it.

¹²⁵ CR. 'These apostolic vicars must either have been among the favoured few admitted to the secrets of these demoniacal agents, or we are reduced to the necessity to use the bishop's language "of accusing them of imposture".'

The Siamese are convinced that these demons are nothing other than the souls of those who have not been cremated. They distinguish between two kinds of Phi. Some, which they call Phi-Suk, meaning cooked devils, are the souls of those whose bodies have been cremated. These souls are harmless, and are no longer on earth. The others, which they call Phi-Dep,¹²⁶ meaning raw devils, are the souls of those whose bodies have not been cremated. The bodies of those who cannot be cremated, according to their laws, are those of pregnant women, of persons who have died a violent death or from a crushing apoplectic attack or similar accident. All these bodies are deposited in a little open dwelling they call Pacha.¹²⁷ This is the place where the sorcerers meet to conduct their diabolical rites. The Siamese have temples and idols (the Christians call the pagan temples and the idols pagodas) which, they say, are the images of their gods. They think that these statues, as soon as they are enshrined in the temples, become real divinities. They do not carry out [131] sacrifices proper, but only present offerings of flowers and candles four times a month, on the 1st, 8th, 14th, and 21st lunar days. Sometimes people meet in the temple to play instruments. During great calamities, they carry in procession some of their most famous idols. When they need rain, they put their idols out in the sun. If there is too much rain, they open up the roof of the temple. They imagine that the idol, disturbed by the rain, will restore calm in the skies. Several of these idols have no name other than the material with which they are made; in this way than speak of the golden god [พระทอง], the glass god [พระแก้ว], etc. which is in such a pagoda; from wherever the statue comes, it will be well received in Siam, and its apotheosis will soon be assured. Europeans coming to this country should avoid giving the Siamese any kind of image if they do not wish to increase their superstitions; our Christians show in this respect a caution which could serve as an example to many French nationals. Not only do they never give the gentiles an engraving, but they courageously refuse the commission of the king to buy for them some statues when they go to Bengal. The monarch might well be irritated and threaten them, but they remain firm in their refusal. This causes the king to be told on more than one occasion that of all his subjects, only the Christians know how to say no.

Some years back a glass statue was brought from the kingdom of Laos;¹²⁸ this idol commands much respect in the court. Last year another, in gold, was brought,

¹²⁶ *Dip* rather than *dep*.

¹²⁷ The *pacha* ป่าช้า, in the text 'Paxa', is not a dwelling but an open area of ground.

¹²⁸ An image made of crystalline stone that takes a high polish is called a *phra kaeo*. Bruguière has adopted another meaning ('glass') for the term *kaeo*, which is not correct in this context. The most famous image popularly known as the Phra Kaeo (and also as the Emerald Buddha) was brought from Vientiane to Thonburi in 1779 and kept in Wat Chaeng (renamed Wat Arun in the Second Reign), adjacent to the palace of King Taksin. When the new palace on the Bangkok side of the river was completed by King Rama I, the image was moved in March 1785 to the new monastery in the Grand Palace grounds, where it remains today.

and has as much prestige as that made of glass.¹²⁹ It was thought that the glass god could be seen to be somewhat jealous of its rival. It was feared, with reason, that resentment [132] would push it to some desperate action, and [it] might even go and put itself at the head of the Lao, its former compatriots, who had revolted. Our king, an astute politician, sought to prevent this misfortune. He therefore had the poor god chained up and assigned it guards.

The Siamese temples have nothing unusual. They are fairly low, square and oblong structures; their roofs are sharply pointed and usually decorated with leaves¹³⁰ or bizarre golden figures.¹³¹ The idols are placed at the far end of the temple. They are placed on a kind of step in the shape of an altar; they are gilded and embellished with a high mitre that ends in a point. Phra-Phu-Thi-Chau is placed in the middle, and is generally colossal. One of these idols is more than 40 feet long, and they were careful to represent it lying down.¹³² All these statues are hideous in shape and sometimes horrible.¹³³ Some have a bird's head, some a snake; some have a human form for the upper part of the body, and what appears to be an animal in the lower part.¹³⁴

In front of the pagodas of some importance there is a small courtyard enclosed by a masonry wall. In the part of the wall facing the temple are brick columns topped by a gilded arrow. The highest columns are called Phra-Chaidi [พระเจ้าดี]. This is one of their gods who sacrificed his life to preserve that of his father.¹³⁵ The smaller ones are pierced with several holes; they are called Phra-Chairai [พระเจ้าร้าย], who are the four brothers of Phra-Chaidi. They did not wish to save their father and as punishment for their inhumanity were transformed, after their death, into furious gods. In their anger, they had their bodies pierced with several holes, filled

¹²⁹ The gold image known as the Phra Bang was brought from Vientiane to Bangkok in early 1828, less than a year after Bruguière's arrival in the capital. It was believed that the spirit of this image is incompatible with that of the Emerald Buddha, and the Phra Bang was taken in 1867 to Luang Prabang, which had been its original home.

¹³⁰ Perhaps *kantoei*, decorative roof supports.

¹³¹ Probably the typical gable finial, *chò fa* ซ้อฟ้า.

¹³² This may be a reference to the so-called 'Sleeping Buddha' at Wat Pho.

¹³³ Such a remark suggests that Bruguière had little or no aesthetic sense. One wonders whether he had in mind the carvings of diabolical creatures that can be found in the portals and interiors of French churches, not to mention the gargoyles.

¹³⁴ Probably the *kinnari*: a mythical creature that is part woman (the upper half) and part bird. The snake is probably a naga. The figures with birds' heads are garudas. Bruguière may well have seen all of these works of art in Wat Phra Kaeo. CR. 'There is an image in a reclining posture in one of the wats near the king's palace, 130 feet long. A few years ago it was struck by lightning, and its head severed from its body.'

¹³⁵ Bruguière's information concerning *chedi* contains only a grain of truth, since the structure commemorates and may contain the ashes of a deceased person. He probably means Phra Chai Di พระเจดีย์, not *phra chedi* พระเจดีย์.

[133] these holes with cotton, swallowed a great quantity of oil and had themselves burnt. Phra-Chaïdi means the god with a kind heart, and Phra Chaïraï the cruel god.¹³⁶ When the Siamese want to build a pagoda they place in the foundations the 12 principal stones, which they call the 12 marvellous sons.¹³⁷ Facing the pagoda, but at a certain distance, they erect a wooden column. On this column they hoist a flag. Sometimes they place two armed statues dressed in the European fashion, as if to guard the flag.¹³⁸

I shall stop this tiresome account. Such is the blindness of a people who nevertheless are fairly shrewd and sharp. Such is man given over just to the enlightenment of his reason and enslaved by his passions. Such would we be if God had not illuminated our ancestors, if He had not given them the necessary help to embrace the truth after knowing it. When one hears the Siamese churn out so many follies which they believe to be incontestable truths, one cannot stop oneself laughing out of pity;¹³⁹ but when one considers that their obstinacy in continuing their erroneous beliefs must cause them eternal damnation, one is forced to weep at their strange obstinacy. Pray to God the Father of mercy to illuminate their minds and remove the iniquity in their hearts, so that they can recognise and worship God their creator, and He whom He sent, His son, the redeemer of the world.

In the middle of so many follies, it is easy to perceive several dogma of the Christian religion, such as the creation of the world, the first man and women, the existence of angels and demons, the immortality of the soul, the flood, heaven, hell, the incarnation of the Word, the second coming, the virginity of the holy Mother,¹⁴⁰ the signs and calamities which [134] will precede the second coming, the end of the world, the resurrection, the judgment, and eternal happiness.

They certainly have some rituals from the Roman church. The hierarchy of the talapoins is absolutely the same as that of the Catholic Church. The Siamese believe that their religion comes from the island of Ceylon, but none of those I questioned could tell me at which period it began to be practiced among them.

¹³⁶ Phra Chai Di the benevolent deity, Phra Chai Rai, the cruel deity.

¹³⁷ This seems to be a reference to the stones (*sima* or *luk nimit*) that mark the boundaries of the ordination hall (*uposatha*) in a monastery, although Bruguière's number is wrong. Ordinarily, one stone is placed at each of the eight compass points, and the ninth stone is buried within the resulting boundaries.

¹³⁸ The guardian *yak* (giants) are not usually dressed in the European fashion, but many stone (usually granite) statues in the form of European soldiers were imported from China as ballast. Some are to be found at Wat Suthat, for example.

¹³⁹ The same could be said for some of Bruguière's interpretations. He was apparently relying on very ignorant informants. Much is probably drawn from folk beliefs, in contrast to textual orthodoxy.

¹⁴⁰ There is nothing about this in Bruguière's extensive account of Siamese religious beliefs, though a few paragraphs above Bruguière says that Phra Si An had a mother but no father, which may count as a virgin birth.

Their religion is absolutely the same as the Burmans and the Peguans. It was at first the same as that of Chinese bonzes,¹⁴¹ the followers of Fo.¹⁴² Even today there are many connections between them. There can be no doubt that these peoples obtained their religious system from the ancient inhabitants of the Southeast Asian peninsula,¹⁴³ but did they receive it directly from the Indians, or did the Chinese or the Burmese transmit it to the Siamese? I do not know. Tonkin and Cochinchina were formerly Chinese provinces. Probably Siam was too. The Siamese kings are still required to send every three years an ambassador and presents to the Chinese emperor. Following this hypothesis, would they not have received their religion from their former rulers? I leave it to others more learned than me to decide a question which is unimportant.

[CHRISTIANITY IN SIAM]

The Portuguese were the first to have preached the Gospels in Siam.¹⁴⁴ This mission was some time later entrusted to French missionaries,¹⁴⁵ who have maintained it since then.¹⁴⁶ It was in Siam that our first apostolic vicars began to exercise their jurisdiction.¹⁴⁷ In Siam the first general seminary was established for most of the eastern missions beyond the Ganges. This seminary does not exist any more;¹⁴⁸ the wars [135] with the Burmans and the huge distances obliged the

¹⁴¹ CR. 'If it had been stated that Buddhism, the religion of Siam, Burmah etc., prevails very extensively in China, it would have given a more correct impression.'

¹⁴² Fo (佛) is a Chinese name for the Buddha. Bruguère may have visited Chinese Buddhist temples in Batavia, Macau and Penang prior to his arrival in Bangkok. And he may have become acquainted with Chinese Buddhism during his studies at the Paris seminary.

¹⁴³ Bruguère actually writes 'the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula beyond the Ganges'.

¹⁴⁴ The Portuguese arrived in Siam in 1511, but did not immediately launch into religious endeavour. The earliest-known Portuguese Dominicans arrived in 1567.

¹⁴⁵ In 1662 in fact: on 22 August Jacques de Bourges, Pierre Lambert de la Motte, and François Deydier arrived in Ayutthaya, but Siam was not the intended destination of the French missionaries. A July 1669 papal brief gave them jurisdiction in Siam. The first bishop (Louis Laneau) to be appointed for Siam was consecrated in Ayutthaya, but not until 1674, after living there for ten years.

¹⁴⁶ Typical of French priests, Bruguère denigrates the roles of other Europeans (largely Portuguese, but also Italians, Flemings, Spaniards and others), who maintained the Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian missions in Ayutthaya. They worked separately from the French mission, although they were nominally under the jurisdiction of the bishops (all of whom were French).

¹⁴⁷ As noted above, this statement is untrue. The first French bishops were on mission as apostolic vicars to Vietnam and China. At first, they had no jurisdiction in Siam.

¹⁴⁸ This statement is true only in the sense of the seminary buildings at and near Ayutthaya, which were destroyed by the Burmese during the 1765–7 war. The seminarians were moved at that time to Cambodia, subsequently to the French colony of Pondichery and, finally, settled permanently at Penang (where Bruguère had taught prior to going to Bangkok).

Apostolic Vicars to establish individual seminaries in their respective provinces. Some years ago another was established at Pulo Pinang (Prince of Wales Island), but there are only young Chinese ecclesiastics there, from Su-Tchuen [Sichuan] province. They have to travel more than 800 leagues overland or by sea to reach their seminary, and the same to return to their country.

Although the mission in Siam has far fewer Christians than the flourishing missions in China, Tonkin, and Cochinchina, the holy ministry does not function without success. Siam is indeed not a fertile soil [for conversions], but neither is it a land entirely sterile: God has his elected, as elsewhere. Christians of solid piety exist; I know some who have amply confessed their faith in the torments of death. Every year we baptise a certain number of adults; in order to do so, some have to make rather painful sacrifices. The bishop, who is better able to judge the intentions of these people, maintains that if there were in Siam a greater number of European priests, there would be more gentiles converting. The Christian religion in Penang, tended by two French priests, flourishes and clearly increases. A great number of the faithful, relative to the population, seek instruction.

It is true that many of these neophytes, such as the Chinese, return to their own country. But does it matter? They remain nonetheless children of the Church,¹⁴⁹ although no longer forming part of our mission. The Siamese convert with difficulty, but this difficulty should not discourage a missionary. There are many other [136] nationalities to which he can preach, like the Chinese, Cochinchinese, and Cambodians, for in the kingdom of Siam there are at least as many foreigners as Siamese. There are many adults, especially among the Chinese, who ask for baptism on the point of dying. There is no hospital in Bangkok. When a foreigner falls sick, there is nowhere to help him but the pagoda; he finds there shelter from the elements, a little rice, and that is all.¹⁵⁰ The bishop considered it appropriate to have constructed in the grounds of his seminary a fairly large and convenient house. He receives in it all the sick persons who present themselves, without discrimination; they are fed, looked after, and taught the chief articles of the Christian religion; almost all receive baptism.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ CR. 'What is here related might lead us to think that many of the Siamese had professed Christianity, whereas the facts of the case go to prove that while many Cochinchinese, a few Chinese and other foreigners have been baptised, not one pure Siamese has ever professed the Catholic faith. We are confirmed in this opinion from what we have heard from the Siamese and from the Catholic priests residing in that country.'

¹⁵⁰ Bruguière is badly misinformed. Many *bhikkhu* were herbalists and skilled in treating the ill and infirm, and medical treatises were kept in monastic libraries.

¹⁵¹ Monsignor Florens established the first Western-style hospital in Bangkok, albeit on a small scale. Six years after this description was written, the first American medical missionary arrived in Bangkok and set up an infirmary in a floating house, where he dispensed medicines and his message of the Protestant faith.

When adults obstinately refuse to listen to the missionary, his ministry because of that has not been in vain. He is consoled by baptizing children in danger of dying;¹⁵² there is no obstacle to this: the parents believe that they are being given a cure which will bring them good health again. It is remarkable that, for nearly two centuries, baptism has been administered in this country, there is almost no gentile who hesitates to have his child baptised. They present themselves, and their children, to receive water which has such marvellous results. Our Christians, who often baptise more than us, are so discrete that I cannot stop admiring them; they are very silent on this point. The princes and the people are persuaded that we are practising medicine, and call that doing good works. As for us, we let them believe what they will; though it is never permitted to speak against the truth, neither is there always an obligation to tell the whole [137] truth.¹⁵³ Almost all these children die after receiving baptism. They are so many predestined souls who pray for the conversion of their parents and the prosperity of the mission. This activity does not gratify one's self-respect, no doubt, but the result is nonetheless real, and less dangerous. The small number of priests forces the bishop to give this good deed to [unordained] believers. The Christian soldiers who were in Lao have baptised a great number.¹⁵⁴ From this, it is easy to believe that the presence of a missionary is not completely useless in Siam. Native priests, either here or elsewhere, could never substitute for European missionaries. In the Indies edifying priests are formed, who are fairly well educated and even zealous. But they have not the activity or necessary talent to find resources on occasions when everything seems hopeless, or the courage to push a perilous undertaking to its conclusion. They can preserve and care for the Christians already existing, but I do not think they would greatly increase the number of converts if they were left to themselves; they are gentle, quiet and know how to control themselves. They work well when there is a European at their head; then they are courageous and successfully work for the conversion of infidels. Perhaps they even do more good than the missionaries, because they know the language and customs of the country. They know better what one has to do to insinuate oneself among the gentiles; but, as ever, they need a guide. Therefore, send us some humble, obedient and zealous priests. They are not absolutely required to be very talented; providing they are saintly, that is good enough. You do not need transcendent genius to argue with ignorant infidels who [138] profess the most absurd and revolting errors. The saint-like nature of a missionary has more force

¹⁵² In the belief that baptized children can go to heaven.

¹⁵³ Bruguière's casuistry is rather startling.

¹⁵⁴ By 'in Lao' Bruguière means in the lands that were Lao-speaking. One of his letters mentions a plan to go there, possibly referring to the area of Nong Khai. The 'Christian soldiers' may have been local priests ordained by the French missionary or may have been lay-workers.

than drawing conclusions from two propositions. However, one must be prepared for many difficulties. It is the nature of the true religion always to have enemies and gainsayers. Jesus Christ promised his apostles no other reward in this world than persecution and suffering.

The difficulties encountered today by the propagation of the Faith in these countries are the same as occurred in the early centuries of the Church: the superstition of some, indifference, passions, love of independence in others, fear in everyone. The monarch fears his subject, and his subjects fear incurring the wrath of the monarch if they convert to Christianity. There is another incitement among the great personages: polygamy and the fear they have of Europeans. The huge power of the English in India has inspired terror throughout the Orient. Almost all [the] peninsula beyond the Ganges has submitted to them, not to count the Sophy of Persia,¹⁵⁵ who has become virtually their vassal. They have conquered the Mogul empire, and the last successor of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane has become a pensioner of a group of merchants. Their flag floats over more than 16,000 leagues of coastline. This formidable power, ever increasing, has thrown all the courts of Asia into consternation. The King of Siam fears one day being tipped off his throne. When he sees a European he always thinks it is an English emissary; he makes no distinction between a priest and a lay person. My presence in Kedah caused a great sensation. The king was alerted to it by special courier, and without the protection of the King of Ligor,¹⁵⁶ [139] who undertook to overcome all the difficulties, I would have had to have taken another route. The King of Cochinchina has closed all his ports to the English. The Emperor of China has expressly required the English company¹⁵⁷ not to take on board any European missionaries; happily for us little attention is paid to this prohibition. It is impossible to convince an Asian ruler that a European would come to the end of the world just to convert the heathens, at the cost of his life. They always suspect a hidden motive. They are afraid that the missionary might be a spy sent to their realm by the Europeans, to weave some plot, or draw up plans of localities, towns, provinces, etc. A geographic map, a book written in an unknown language, some lines written on a scrap of paper, which fell by chance into the hands of a provincial governor, are enough to set a vast empire in motion and provoke violent persecution. Many fail to distinguish between [Catholic] Christians and the [secular] English; others are reasonably aware of the different European states. I was surprised to hear Malay, Siamese, and Chinese speak about France, the revolution, Bonaparte and some aspects of his life in some detail. But they imagine that all Christians have a common goal. They even believe that at the

¹⁵⁵ A general term among Europeans for the King of Persia.

¹⁵⁶ This was described in an earlier letter. It was not the king of Nakhon Sithammarat, but the quasi-hereditary governor, often referred to by Europeans as the 'rajah'.

¹⁵⁷ The East India Company.

approach of the English all their Christian subjects will join forces with them, so little do they understand Christian principles.

These then are the difficulties holding back the progress of the Gospels, but this does not stop it completely. The grace of God is stronger than hell, and God is sufficiently powerful to extract from the darkness of unbelieving those [140] He has elected for all eternity. One can find in [the] apostolic vicariate of Siam, especially in Penang, Christians from all parts of the globe. Respect, veneration and affection for the priests, decency, modesty and contemplation in the churches; these are the chief characteristics singling out the Christians in this country. Divine service is celebrated with discipline and solemnity, which somewhat surprised and edified me when I first witnessed this. I had never expected to see in Siam a bishop celebrate services with a ceremonial equal to that in French cathedrals. The young priests, and even the choirboys, carry out their duties with an exactitude and unity one does not often find elsewhere. It is true that this is somewhat due to their nature. Almost all our Christians can read, many can sing plainchant. They have talent for music; their voices are clear, gentle and in tune. The Chinese, on the contrary, have no inclination for or ability in singing.

In Bangkok, there are more instructions, sermons, [and] catechisms than in any church in France. Can you believe that the stations [of the cross] are observed during Lent, and three sermons a week are preached?

The priest does not experience, unlike in France, difficulties in approaching the sick. He does not need to be circumspect in getting them to confess; the sick person and all his relatives forewarn him; they call in the priest even before the danger is imminent. It never occurs to them that a minister of religion could cause a sickness to worsen.

The Christians in Bangkok have not forgotten their first fathers in the Faith, the Portuguese missionaries. They consider themselves in honour bound to speak their language; they all have Portuguese names; many [141] even want to be considered as descendants of the old Portuguese established in the Indies. They imitate them in the architecture and decoration of their churches, in the order of their processions, and many other things. They freely adopt European dress, but are not fussy about what they put on: one person will wear a jerkin with the corners cut off, another an English frock-coat; this person will appear in public dressed like a gamekeeper, another like a policeman with two enormous colonel's epaulettes. One can see children rigged out in a dressing gown of broad stripes, or a kind of red doublet, like Henri IV, and usually barefoot. They above [all] are unaware of this mixture, and are convinced this is correct European dress.

The bishop has his residence in the seminary. I do not know what terms to employ to designate the place where His Lordship lives. It is neither a palace nor a bourgeois mansion. Imagine a few planks placed on four beams, forming a small

rectangle covered with maize straw, and you would have a fairly accurate idea of the hovel which His Lordship has chosen for his residence.¹⁵⁸ The only furniture is an old chair, a bench on which are balanced a few books, and a plank for sleeping on. His wardrobe is no better; it consists of two cassocks, one violet and kept in reserve for great occasions. The other is black, patched on one side and torn on the other. This is the one Monsignor usually wears. He has a pair of shoes, but wears them only to say mass. The chapel corresponds to the simplicity of the furnishings. A small silver chalice, some copper ewers, a mitre his Christians presented to him, a wooden crozier, a ring with a setting holding a piece of [142] glass for want of a precious stone: this is what comprises the chapel of the Apostolic Vicar of Siam. Monsignor is happy in this show of poverty. He is concerned only about his seminary and his poor. He was reduced to terrible trials for many years; he received nothing from France. It is easy to imagine his distress in a country which offered no resources. Today, thanks to the charity of fervent souls constituting the Association of the Propagation of the Faith,¹⁵⁹ Monsignor can hope to satisfy the needs of his seminary. Besides, if the Bishop of Sozopolis¹⁶⁰ is poor in precious furniture, he is very rich in virtue. I particularly admire his equanimity, which nothing disturbs. Such examples of meekness and patience were very necessary for me!

We enjoy for the moment much tranquillity, but one should not count on it. It is a calm day in a stormy sea, which can change at any moment into a violent tempest. The king we have does not dare require a Christian to do anything if it is forbidden by our holy religion. When he gives an order to the Christians, he first asks then if they can carry it out without sinning. He realizes that his predecessors came off so badly by persecuting Christianity that he is always afraid of incurring the same fate in imitating their behaviour. He is especially severe about the holy nature of Sunday. When he instructs Christians to do something on a feast day, he only has to be informed that they are busy that day with their religious devotions, than he at once revokes the order. Too many Frenchmen would treat this scrupulousness of conscience as fanaticism or childishness unworthy of a king! But He will be their judge on judgement day.

[143] I should not let you be unaware that the adversary has come to sow tares among the good seeds, though happily this unwelcome germ has up to now not produced many results: I speak of Methodist missionaries which various Protestant organizations have sent, at great expense, to the four corners of the world.

¹⁵⁸ In contrast to the mental image that a Frenchman might have of a bishop in France, Monsignor Florens led a life of poverty equal to that of his parishioners.

¹⁵⁹ Which published this letter.

¹⁶⁰ This was the official title of Monsignor Florens (in this position 1811–1834); from the seventeenth century the Roman church appointed bishops to lapsed sees and did not create regular dioceses in Southeast Asian countries.

They assume the title of apostolic missionaries, though God and his Apostles have not sent them. They have published an account of their missions, in which they wrote what suited them.¹⁶¹ There are some who have dared to compare their work to that of the Apostles; however, if one is to judge the success of their colleagues by the success of those I have seen, the result of their labours is no consolation. There is one in Penang who scatters piastres by the handful; his wife supports his efforts employing the same means, but they labour in vain. No one, or almost no one, wants to join them.¹⁶²

When a heathen wants to take instruction in the Christian religion, he goes directly to the Catholic missionaries; he sees in the same place several societies who all oppose each other, who all claim to be the true church of Jesus Christ; but he always chooses the company of Catholics, who promise no material advantages. Whence comes this preference of a Chinese, a Malay, or a Kaffir¹⁶³ for the Catholics over the Anglicans, the Armenians and the Methodists? Is it not because the legitimate spouse of Jesus Christ, the true mother of the children of God, enshrines such self-evident legitimate characteristics that it is easy, even for the most ignorant heathens, to distinguish it from all those who are but unnatural mothers. The greater danger does not come from English preachers; [144] the mass of unprincipled irreligious Europeans, almost entirely devoid of morality, who swarm in the East Indies, is still more to be feared. But among these travellers the French are perhaps the most dangerous; their frivolous playful talk, their bad habit of joking about everything, of speaking about everything without rhyme or reason, is highly conducive to producing the most lamentable impression on the minds of heathen and converts. What do you want these poor natives to think, when a fool who prides himself on being a compatriot of the Apostolic Vicar and the missionaries, on professing the same religion, attacks the principles of the same religion with indiscreet conversation and impious banter, and dishonours it with immoral conduct? What would you have them think when they do not see such a person attend any service, or only come to cause a scandal? The English, it is true, are not more edifying, but there is a ready-made answer – they are English heretics. That is enough to destroy the impression a bad example can give. But what can one say, how can one put paid to the scandal, when a Catholic Frenchman gives this example? The

¹⁶¹ Bruguière says elsewhere in his letter that he does not speak English, so he could not have read this account. There were no Methodists in Thailand. While in Penang, Bruguière must have learned about the Penang mission of the non-denominational London Missionary Society, which also had missions in Melaka and Singapore. Here he may be referring more generally to the *WMMS Reports: Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* published annually in London from 1818.

¹⁶² Bruguière is as charitable to the Protestant missionaries as he is to the Siamese talapoins.

¹⁶³ A black, an African.

bishop is unwell every time the arrival of some European is announced. But divine providence happily does not allow for these visits frequently. Few French people come to Siam. It is extremely sad to be reduced to fearing the presence of a compatriot, the sight of whom should produce a great sensation of joy and happiness in a strange country, so far from the motherland!¹⁶⁴

[PHYSIQUE]

I ought now to speak to you about the customs and even the physical constitution of the Siamese; but as I have already observed that Siam comprises many foreigners, I thought you would not be adverse to my speaking at the same time about the habits and prejudices of all these peoples when they are different from those of the Siamese: again, I shall relate only what I consider worthy of mentioning.

The Siamese are of indifferent height and fairly similar, almost without the physical defects so common in Europe. Perhaps a single province in France comprises more blind, lame and similarly afflicted persons than the whole kingdom of Siam. Their heads are square rather than round; their faces are flat and lozenge-shaped. Their cheeks are slightly hollow, the cheek bones, [150] lips and the corresponding part of the jaw are slightly projecting, the nose is squashed, the eyes black and fairly wide open, the hair very black, rough and spiky. The Siamese men and women readily shave their heads, but most often they just crop their hair very close. They keep in the front a tuft which they push back by using a kind of oil. Women do not have this tuft of hair. Some are copper-red in colour, and others lemon-yellow.¹⁶⁵ I have seen Asiatics from all the kingdoms and nearly all the provinces between the 5th and 41st latitude north, and 91° and 118° longitude east, meridian of Siam, that is, from Ligor to Tartary in China, from the Ganges to the sea.¹⁶⁶ It seems to me that all these Asians had some similar features, either in the shape of the body or in their colour: each of these peoples no doubt has characteristic features. It is easy to distinguish between a Siamese and a Cochinchinese, a Chinese and even someone from Tonkin. But the difference is hardly more noticeable than that existing in Europe between a Frenchman, a Spaniard, and a German. The Malays are different; they are darker and have more pronounced features than the Siamese. Some peoples are very close to the equator, and yet they are as pale as those Europeans who are very dark. Such are the inhabitants of the island of

¹⁶⁴ The published text has a break here on p.144, and resumes in the subsequent issue of the *Annales* on p.149.

¹⁶⁵ CR. 'The Siamese both male and female shave the head, leaving a tuft on the top which stands erect. The priests shave the head entirely.'

¹⁶⁶ The sea presumably being the South China Sea.

Nias,¹⁶⁷ which is only 2 degrees 30 minutes latitude north and 95° longitude east, meridian of Paris. These people are very gentle, with simple and pure customs: all those who come to [151] areas occupied by Europeans become Christians. In all the peoples I have written about their colour is uniform. One does not see, as in Europe, gradations of blond, white, and rosy-pink. It is as though they all wear a yellow paper mask. The Chinese have smaller eyes than the Siamese; their eyelids form a diagonal angle pointing towards the nose. It is as though they were forever taking a nap, but this is not so at all, because they constitute the sharpest and most astute people in the world. To deceive a Chinese, or not to be deceived by one if you often have dealings with him, is almost extraordinary (I refer to pagan Chinese). All the peoples who live on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts,¹⁶⁸ Bengal, and in a word the inhabitants of India,¹⁶⁹ are darker, at the same latitude, than those beyond the Ganges.¹⁷⁰ But their traits are similar to those of Europeans: there are clearly marked nuances in their faces, though perhaps their bodies are more spare and slight than Europeans’.

[DRESS]

The dress of the Siamese is very simple. They go barefoot and bareheaded. Their only clothes are a piece of coloured cloth they tie to their belt; they bring it round to the rear, which makes the cloth look like shorts (I shall call it *langouti*¹⁷¹). This is the usual dress of both men and women. Poor persons rarely make use of a parasol; the grandees, on the contrary, always have one. Market women cover their heads with a hat that is nothing but a straw basket. When a person of low rank comes before his superior, he adds a silk belt to his dress. The colour varies according to the rank of the wearer. [152] First class mandarins have a white belt. On the first day of the four phases of the moon, which can be considered as a Siamese Sunday, all the court wears a white langouti. The king is in no way distinguished from his subjects in either the form or the sumptuousness of his dress. Princes sometimes wear footwear like sandals. When inferiors come before a mandarin, or any other person holding rank, they remove their footwear, if they have any, which is rare. It is the same when they enter a church. In Penang, the Malay women who have embraced the Christian religion scrupulously observe this custom. In Siam young boys up to the age of 10 or 12 go completely naked. Little girls at the age of 5 or 6 are given

¹⁶⁷ Off the west coast of Sumatra. At the time of this writing, there was a plan to send French missionaries from Penang to Nias—which explains Bruguère’s familiarity with this island.

¹⁶⁸ Respectively parts of the western and eastern coasts of the sub-continent.

¹⁶⁹ Indostan in the original.

¹⁷⁰ That is, in Southeast Asia.

¹⁷¹ A term, very common in later French colonial writing, deriving from Hindi, for a piece of cloth hanging in front, normally from a waistband, worn by the poor in India.

the langouti to wear. The infidels are so crass that they do not consider the indecency or the dangers of such an abominable costume. Howsoever indecent the costume of the Siamese might be, it is tolerable when compared with that of some Indians on the other side of the Ganges, whose brazen impudence fringes on brutality. Christian women are more aware of the rules of modesty which are so appropriate to their sex; they are always decently dressed when they appear in public. The Siamese do not use pocket handkerchiefs; they have a very simple way of clearing their nose. They cannot see without being horrified a European take his handkerchief, use it, and put it back in his pocket. Do you not think they are right?

Wealth among the Siamese is not in the grandeur of their clothes, as they are almost entirely naked. It is seen in precious stones and jewellery of all kinds. One sees children covered in gold and gems from head [153] to toe.¹⁷² Asian ostentation and the little care some people take with their children are sometimes the cause of much misfortune; robbers, meeting these children in out-of-the-way places, have cut off their arms or even killed them to seize their jewellery. You can see some natives who go so far as to wear rings on their toes. There are women who wear gold pendants and brooches in their noses; I think they come from Indostan.

The dress of the China, Tonkinese, and Cochinchinese is very decent; they all wear, both men and women, loose trousers with a jacket or shirt above.¹⁷³ People of substance in China wear long silk gowns, and above them a kind of rochet of blue silk, usually lined. They have small boots of white silk and cloth shoes cut away at the heel; their sole is half [154] leather and half cardboard or thread; some are richly embroidered. The Chinese wear their hair so long that sometimes it reaches the ground. They shave part of the head and retain only the hair in the middle, of which they make a plait which they let hang behind them. Sometimes they wind it round their head. The Cochinchinese do not plait their hair, but arrange it on their heads. All these people like to grow a beard, but theirs is not very attractive; they admire those of Europeans. The Siamese, on the contrary, greatly dislike beards and pull out the hair with tiny tweezers.

[THE LOT OF WOMEN]

The costume of Chinese women is no different from that of men, except that their robe is longer. They keep all their hair which they tie up in the same way as Cochinchinese. From the age of five or six they twist the toes, but not the biggest,

¹⁷² CR. 'Children generally wear rings upon the ankles and wrists, the rich of gold or silver, and the poor of the inferior metals, but they are far from being "covered with gold", or indeed with anything else, as their bracelets and anklets constitute in general the only clothing of children.'

¹⁷³ An extensive editorial note appears here in the original going into great detail about dress codes in Tonkin and Cochinchina.

under the sole of the foot. [155] This barbaric custom began some time after our ordinary era. The emperor Schou¹⁷⁴ of the sixteenth dynasty introduced it to make women more sedentary. Indeed, they walk with difficulty. It is as though they walk with shackles or on thorns. This practice is not generally adopted. Chinese ladies always have a fan in their hands. When they go out, which is very rare, they are seated in a sedan chair which is like a cathedral stall; it is covered and carried by two men. In Macao they enjoy rather more freedom; in many places they smoke like their husbands: they are copied in this by the Spanish ladies in Manila. I have seen Portuguese women smoke in Macao, but do not know if this practice is general. Malay and Siamese women chew tobacco like sailors, but they add various ingredients.

In Siam, and in all parts of Asia where Christianity has been unable to improve their lot, women are all more or less slaves of their husbands; one can clearly see the threat God issued to persons of their sex in the person of Eve. Among the nobility, women are shut up in the harem, from which they almost never emerge. When the princes grant audience, the women position themselves at the end of the gallery, but at a lower level, or behind a straw curtain which allows them to see and hear everything, while being seen by no one. They never eat with their husbands; in their presence they contrive not to be at the same level as them. If a woman positioned herself somewhere where she was at a higher level than her husband, or if she accidentally displayed a handkerchief [156] or a belt above the level of his head, nothing more would be needed to upset the household, and perhaps lead to open rupture. The husband would consider this an insult, and incontestable proof that his wife sought to dominate the household. To ask a mandarin news of his wife, to greet her, to speak to her, even in the presence of the husband, are so many things forbidden in Siam and elsewhere. Such actions would cause both surprise and scandal. An Asian could never be persuaded that a woman is a person important enough for a sensible man to be in the least concerned about, or take an interest in her health.¹⁷⁵ In one province in this kingdom, men would consider themselves dishonoured if they passed somewhere soiled by the presence of a woman.¹⁷⁶ One of our priests who was sent on a mission among these people was told sometimes ‘Do not go there; women go there.’ Men do not want the women to enter the house through the same door as them. On the same principle of *equity*,¹⁷⁷ they refuse to

¹⁷⁴ Bruguière is probably referring to a Song-dynasty emperor of the tenth century, when foot-binding began.

¹⁷⁵ There is at this point in the original an editorial footnote indicating the same attitude in ‘Indostan’.

¹⁷⁶ CR. ‘As we know not where the “province” here alluded to is situated, we cannot decide as to the accuracy of this statement.’

¹⁷⁷ Italics in the original.

admit them to heaven. They think it would be unworthy for a man to find himself in heaven with a woman. Low class women can go out of their houses, but not to go for a walk, only to work in the countryside or conduct some minor trading. While most often the husband is at play, drinks, sleep or works for the monarch, the woman attends to maintaining the whole family by her labour and industry. [157] The Christians alone do not share these prejudices. They conduct themselves in regard to their wives more or less like Europeans.

Polygamy is permitted to all men. The king gives the title of queen to only one of his wives, in relation to whom the others are inferior in every respect. She is called *Ackhamaessi* [*akkhara mahesi* อัครมเหสี]. Ordinary individuals also have the right to select one wife who carries the title *Mia-jai* [*mia yai* เมียใหญ่], that is, big wife; she has authority over all the others. When a Siamese wants to marry, he does not take a wife, he buys her. The price is not fixed, but depends on the goodwill of the relatives of the future wife. By virtue of this contract, the law allows the husband the right to beat her, dismiss her, or sell her as a slave. He is allowed to kill her in only one instance. These rights are not reciprocal. Thus, if the woman flees to her relatives because of being badly treated, the husband has the right to reclaim her as an object belonging to him by contract of sale. But women driven to despair often poison their husbands. Parents have the right to sell their children, and frequently do so. Nothing is more common in Siam than to see children sold as slaves. The circumstances of these poor children are not very harsh, as the Siamese are naturally gentle. Their parents can buy them back by returning the money they had received.

This custom, as inhuman as it is, is less barbaric than that of the Chinese, who murder their own children. In Fukien [Fujian] province, the parents retain the lives of all the boys, but rarely retain more than two daughters. All those born afterwards are killed without pity. It is the mothers who are the slaughterers of their own children: [158] when the woman has given birth, the husband returns and asks if she gave birth to a boy; if the reply is negative, he leaves, not hiding his ill temper, and the sentence of death is pronounced for this innocent creature who has just been born. The unnatural mother immediately takes her daughter and smothers her with her own hands! The government is far from acting against those guilty of such actions. It is generally acknowledged in China that nature allows parents the right to dispose of their children or raise them, as they wish. During a period of persecution of the Christians, some of our books were seized. A commission of well-read mandarins was named to examine them; all, with one exception, declared that they contained nothing bad. The person who delivered a contrary opinion maintained this religion was bad and the books pernicious because, he said, one of the books related that the God of the Christians severely punished a father who had

unjustly killed his daughter (he had read the life of St Barbe¹⁷⁸); this, he added, was clearly dangerous. Does a father not have the right to put to death his daughter if he wishes to do so? I do not think these horrors exist in all the provinces of the empire. Perhaps it is even possible that this execrable custom has significantly diminished in some places. Since Christianity came to China, the heathens began to be ashamed of their barbarism. It is to be hoped that as the number of Christians ever increases, infanticide will become almost unknown in that unhappy land.

[OBDURACY IN BELIEFS]

The Siamese are, it is said, less vicious than other infidel peoples, but one should not think that in consequence they are greatly imbued with moral virtues. [159] Only Christianity makes men truly virtuous. Pride, insensitivity, cruelty even, lewdness often carried to the most shameful excesses have always been, and always will be, the attributes of heathens. All these people of the Indies, who have been so much praised no doubt because they were pagans, are much less than perfect. It is impossible that they be sincere in relation to some matters which they permit; their fate is doubtless to be pitied, and there is no sacrifice a charitable Christian should not make to obtain their conversion. But, in the end, it is easy to see that their censure is deserved, and that divine justice only punishes in them their voluntary obduracy; on the contrary, all those who faithfully follow their conscience are always those who become Christians. The Brahmins, the Samnias¹⁷⁹ among the idolaters, the Santons¹⁸⁰ and dervishes among the Mohammedans are distinguished from the generality of heathens only by their more arrogant pride and by their greater hypocrisy.

[THE NATURE OF THE SIAMESE]

The Siamese are by nature quite gentle, frivolous, unthinking, timid, and light-hearted: they like people who are gay. They dislike disputes and anything which smacks of anger or impatience; I refer to scientific disputes, for in other matters they often turn a dispute into a full combat where there are several partisans. They would be almost scandalized to see a priest continue the mass after speaking with zeal and vehemence in his sermon. They are lazy, inconstant, and take pleasure in amusements; a trifle catches their attention and a trifle distracts them. They are constant applicants for favours; everything pleases them and they ask for everything, from the most precious objects to things of little value. This fault is

¹⁷⁸ A legendary virgin and martyr.

¹⁷⁹ Brugièrè is possibly referring to the Samnias, a warlike tribal people of Samnium in southern Italy, who fought a series of wars with the early Romans beginning in the fourth century BC.

¹⁸⁰ Santon is a European designation for a monk or hermit among Muslims.

found in both ordinary people and grandees. A prince of the blood does not think it beneath [160] his dignity to ask for some tobacco, a pencil, a watch, a pig: that even happened to me. The king is no more scrupulous than his subjects. It is true they are not annoyed when a favour is asked of them. Polite Siamese behaviour requires that one exchanges presents. When visiting, the first things that are offered are tea and betel. When travelling and visiting certain persons, I have been accompanied by many servants, some carrying rice, vegetables and fruits, others bearing meat, fish, etc. They put all these different foodstuffs in huge brass receptacles, which they take care to carry in a way that everyone can see what they contain. Surrounded by all these people, one seems like a procurer of victuals who has just done the shopping.

The Lao give their presents in a very delicate and ingenious manner. They appear before the person they wish to honour with their benevolence and to pay their compliments. During the course of the conversation, they cleverly place beside him, without him noticing, the present they wish to give him, salute him once more and withdraw. They say one should not make a show of one's gifts.

The Siamese are generally alms-givers. The king should, according to ancient custom, make public donations many times a year. On these occasions people present in his name to all the poor who assemble rice, clothes and money. The present king, it is said, distributes every day to Bangkok's beggars a certain quantity of consumables.

[AMUSEMENTS]

The king and the people love games of pure amusement or exercise. They have other entertainments which are less frequent, such as wrestling, boxing, [161] cock fights, fighting fish or two snakes fighting. They have an entertainment they call *Nang*, because leather is used [in the figures]. This amusement is always very dangerous, because of the swords, daggers, and halberds with which the acrobats and tumblers are bristling. It is like a great magic lantern-show.¹⁸¹ There are also tight-rope dancers. But the amusement which pleases them most and which they run to witness in great haste is what they call *lameng-lakhong*;¹⁸² this is a kind

¹⁸¹Bruguière may have witnessed a performance of *khon na cho nang* โขนหน้าจอหนัง, one of the major forms of Thai dance-drama (*khon*), which is performed in front of the screen of the shadow-play (*nang* or *nang yai*). Descriptions of these performing arts are provided by Rutnin (1993). To explain the effect to his reader, Bruguière makes a comparison with the European magic lantern, which projected an image onto a screen. He may be referring in particular to a very popular type of theatrical performance (*lakhòn*) known as *lakhòn na cho nang* ลครหน้าจอหนัง, in which ten or more dance-drama (*khon*) players perform scenes from the Ramayana in front of the screen of a shadow-play (Rutnin 1993: 90), which may have included battles with much display of weapons.

¹⁸²This description is unclear, no doubt, because the author admits below he has never witnessed a performance. The term *lameng lakhòn* ละเม็งละคร is not a specific type of theatrical performance (*lakhòn*), but a generic term. The prefix *lameng* is a paired word, added for euphony, but does not change the meaning of the term *lakhòn*.

of part-comic, part-pantomime drama. It is said to be the school of every vice. The talapoins, who are not over-scrupulous, condemn this entertainment, which they nevertheless watch themselves, disguised in lay dress. This is said without scandal-mongering. I think you will be sufficiently charitable not to believe I was an eyewitness to these acts. It is not the spectators who pay the actors, but the individual who is providing the entertainment. When the king orders public amusements to be held, his treasurer pays for the expense. The salary of the entertainer is determined by the apparent pleasure he gave the king.¹⁸³

You rarely see in Siam fanatics who mutilate themselves or commit suicide in a public show of courage or piety in support of their false gods. They leave such terrible displays to the inhabitants of Indostan.¹⁸⁴ They believe their lives are too precious to sacrifice so easily. There was, though, one sad case, about two years ago, of someone who announced he was going to burn himself to death in public. And he did indeed go onto the funeral pyre, but hardly had he felt the heat of the flames than he went off to throw himself in the river.[162]

[TALENTS, INDUSTRY and BUILDINGS]

The Siamese are said to have wit and to be intelligent. But as the king takes into his service every person who succeeds in whatever profession it might be, their laziness and the state of servility they live in do not allow them to develop their talents and industry; it is the Chinese who do everything. They alone practise the mechanic arts. Most Siamese have not the means to acquire the workers they would need. They have to do everything by themselves. They are at the same time masons, carpenters, weavers, tailors, etc: you can imagine the level of perfection of the resulting work. They have the same kind of architecture as the Chinese. It is all baubles, pavilions, many roof levels piled one on top of the other, columns and pyramids¹⁸⁵ which they partially cover in gold leaf. This architecture has certainly some charm, but you would look in vain for the noble and dignified character to be

¹⁸³ Bruguière may have witnessed some of the performances that he describes during April and May 1828. Public entertainments were held for seven days and seven nights preceding the cremation of Queen Amarin (the king's paternal grandmother, who was the chief queen of King Rama I) on 2 May 1828. At least six other high-ranking people were cremated soon after, probably with similar public entertainments (Thiphakōrawong 1934: 71–2). Bruguière may have been perplexed by funerary ceremonies that were accompanied by public festivities, very unlike the strictly solemn observances relating to funerals in Europe, and such observances may have appeared 'scandalous' in his eyes.

¹⁸⁴ There is an editorial cross-reference here to an account of this in a previous issue of the *Annales*.

¹⁸⁵ The 'columns' and 'pyramids' are probably stupas in Buddhist temples. The word 'pyramid' was used by seventeenth century French visitors to describe these structures; it was also used to describe canopies.

found in European monuments. This architectural ostentation, howsoever imperfect it might be, is limited to a few pagodas and a very small number of public monuments. Ordinary individuals are not so fussy. They erect quite simply some stakes on which they place a straw or reed cabin, rather like a bird's nest. There are piled up the father, mother, grandparents, children, in addition to all the domestic animals. The wealth of the furnishings corresponds to the magnificence of the architecture: a mat (made from straw or a kind of rush similar to a reed), a plank or a wattle on which to sleep, a stone on which to place the cooking pot, a few small receptacles, a net in which to place small children when they want to sleep—this [163] is all the internal decoration of these sad hovels. The more elegant, or less poor, have wooden houses. The princes, though they are very wealthy, are scarcely better housed. They sometimes hold audience under a shed. The [dwellings in the] city of Bangkok as well as the suburbs are constructed in this fashion. It is criss-crossed by a great number of canals, through which travel a huge number of barges and gondolas. Those of the king and the princes are decorated; those of ordinary individuals and even the great mandarins ought not to be. You can move about and pay visits only by boat. There are few horses and no palanquins. You would think you were in Venice if the dress and language of the inhabitants, and the miserable hovels lining the banks, did not quickly warn you that you were in Siam. In Bangkok you can find what you can often see in China. The Chinese merchants, to spare themselves greater expense, build their houses on the river. They make rafts of bamboo,¹⁸⁶ and tie them up on both sides to posts erected along the river banks. They build their houses and shops on these rafts; as the ropes retaining the rafts tied to the posts are not fixed, the house rises or falls with the tide. If necessary one can in a moment transport both house and goods to another place. The anchor is weighed and the house and inhabitants, using oars, move off at little cost.

[DEFENCES]

Bangkok has some ramparts, but they are flimsy and exposed on all sides. In recent years a few brick walls have been built at the entrance to the port [164] protected by cannons. The Siamese call these forts. I do not know what Vauban¹⁸⁷ would have called them. Since I am writing about Bangkok's ramparts, I must relate a fact which proves to what extent a naturally gentle and humane race can become savage. When a new gate in the city ramparts is built, or when an extant one is repaired, it is required, by I know not what superstitious rule, that three innocent men be sacrificed. This is how this barbaric execution is conducted. The king, after secretly holding council, sends one of his officers near to the gate he

¹⁸⁶ A brief editorial note describing bamboo appears in the original here.

¹⁸⁷ Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707). Commissioner-general of fortifications from 1678. He fortified a number of strongholds on the French frontiers.

wishes to repair. This officer appears from time to time to want to call someone; he repeats several times the name to be given to this door. It happens more than once that the passers-by, hearing someone call out, turn their heads.¹⁸⁸ Immediately the officer, helped by other men posted nearby, arrests three of those who looked back. Their death is from that moment irrevocably decided. No task, no promise, no sacrifice can free them. In the gate a ditch is dug, and above it is placed, at a certain height, an enormous beam. This is held in position by two ropes and suspended horizontally rather like that used in a wine press. On the day designated for this fatal and horrible sacrifice, a splendid meal is served to the three unfortunates. They are ceremoniously escorted to the dreaded ditch. The king and all the court come to salute them. The king charges them, on his own account, to guard well the gate about to be entrusted to them, and to come and give notice if enemies or rebels appear to seize the town. At that moment the ropes are cut, and the unfortunate victims of superstition are [165] crushed by the heavy mass which falls on their heads. The Siamese think that these unfortunates are changed into these spirits they call *Phi*.¹⁸⁹ Ordinary individuals sometimes commit this horrible homicide against their slaves, to make them the guardians, they say, of the treasures they have hidden. Less than five years ago this ceremony worthy of cannibals was performed. Among the three unfortunates arrested was the son of a rich Chinese merchant. His father offered an enormous sum of money to secure the son's release. To no purpose: the seizure was irrevocable. The devil has at all times wanted to be worshipped with human sacrifice. The same man who does not dare kill an insect, for fear of committing an unpardonable crime, does not have the least scruple when it comes to murdering three of his fellows. He thinks he has acted in order to ensure peace and prosperity for a whole empire! Divine providence on this occasion protected the Christians, in a special way. It allowed one of the princes of the blood, who greatly favours the Christians, who was summoned to the council where this barbaric decision was taken, secretly to warn them, right from the next day, not to pass by this gate for some time, or at least not to look around themselves, no matter what cries or noise they heard, because their lives depended on it.

[OCCUPATIONS AND NAVIGATION]

The most common profession of the inhabitants of Bangkok is fishing and navigating, but even though so often on water, they are not the best sailors. They have no notion of nautical science; if they do not have the wind behind them and

¹⁸⁸ CR. 'We are not aware that any custom of this kind exists in Siam.'

¹⁸⁹ A variant of this tradition, which is also said to have existed in Burma, has a pregnant woman caught and offered as a sacrifice to guard the gate. Anna Leonowens, in her fictionalised writing about Bangkok, where she lived from 1862 to 1867, represented Bruguière's tale as a real, contemporary event.

land beside them, they lose their heads. For this reason they take years to complete a two-month journey. Although they go to sea only in the most favourable season, [166] they are not always lucky; I frequently hear about shipwrecks. It is true this is not always the fault of the sailors and the captain; the poor construction of the vessel is greatly responsible. The vessels are mostly Chinese junks, which at the least puff of contrary wind cannot hold fast to their route and drift. These junks are crescent-shaped; for tackle they have but three simple masts without spars; the sails are made from straw or reeds, rattan ropes, and wooden anchors. I did not notice if they had spare masts or sails.

Recently they have begun to build European-style vessels, but I fear errors of judgement will not make navigation safer. If the Siamese do not often consult the map when they are at sea, one has to agree they often consult the devil. They paint on the masts and rudder superstitious signs.¹⁹⁰ When I was with them, I showed my displeasure; they began to laugh, but did not change their ways. The Chinese are perhaps even more superstitious on their vessels. They always have an idol with them, which they worship several times a day, consult, pray to it, ask it for good weather and favourable winds. They do not eat before having offered it all their dishes. It is true that the pilot sometimes takes advantage of his fellows. When he wants to eat fresh meat, he warns the captain that the idol wants a duck or a chicken for its dinner. The captain dares not refuse anything the idol demands, fearing its resentment. That works to the advantage of the crew, because the idol does not eat, and is content with [167] the smell of meat. Anything makes them frightened, and the idol is always their last resort. One of our colleagues threw into the water something which encumbered him; nothing more was needed to cause trouble throughout the ship. Many claimed this action was a very bad augury. Others did not know what to say. They went to ask the devil-idol what he thought of this case, but the good Lord saw to it that the reply was so ambiguous that no one could understand it at all. Thus the uproar slowly diminished, and the missionary was out of danger. He ran the risk of being thrown into the sea if the demon had given an unfavourable reply. In addition to the idol, they also have quite often a big snake. They think shipwreck

¹⁹⁰ CR. 'It is now pretty generally known that through the enterprise of Chau-fa, the younger son of the late king, together with a son of the minister of foreign affairs, several ships have been constructed after European models, the principles of navigation have been studied by the above-named person[s] and taught to other Siamese in their service, and reduced to practice by taking these ships to China and the Straits under the guidance of Siamese navigators. In this respect the Siamese are deserving all praise, and are consequently much in advance of surrounding nations, and of themselves too in other respects.' [This Chau-fa was Prince Chuthamani (1808–1866), the younger full brother of the prince-bhikkhu who succeeded to the throne as King Mongkut (r.1851–1866). Prince Chuthamani was known in the 1830s and 1840s by the title of Prince Itsaret Rangsan and reigned from 1851 until his death with the royal title of King Pin Klao. He resided in the Wang Na (Front Palace) and was the only 'second king' who ever actually had the titles of a king. Eds]

is inevitable if the snake escapes. I should point out to you here that many people in Asia venerate the snake.¹⁹¹ It is as though the devil likes to be worshipped in the form of the snake, which it used to seduce the first woman.

[THE SCIENCES]

In Siam the sciences are no more flourishing than the arts. Learned Siamese know just about how to read and write. They have no idea of physics or astronomy; you can see that in what I told you about their mythology and their visible gods. They do not even know how to construct an almanac. I have heard that they need [in order to do so] the help of the Chinese, who are hardly better astronomers. They have an easier way of revealing the secrets of nature or explaining phenomena. They do not lose themselves in [168] conjectures like our profound philosophers: when something troubles them, they have a ready made answer: *pen-phra*, *pen phi*, they say, meaning 'It's the god', 'it's the demon'. If they see a barometer announcing a storm or calm, they cry out in surprise *Pen-phi*, the devil is in it. Mathematics is totally unknown to the Siamese. They have though some notion of arithmetic; they express quantities with the aid of 10 figures, as follows:

nung, *song*, *sain* [*sam*], *si*, *hoc* [*ha*],¹⁹² *hok*, *tchet*, *peet* [*paet*], *kaou*, *soun*

๑	๒	๓	๔	๕	๖	๗	๘	๙	๐
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0

Calculation using decimals is acknowledged by all civilized people in Asia. The Siamese calculate in the same way as us for multiplying units, up to 10 million. They have no term in their language to express larger units. They have special words to designate the numbers hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million, ten million: 100 *roi*; 1,000, *phan*; 10,000 *mun*; 100,000 *seen* [*saen*]; 1,000,000 *kot*; 10,000,000 *lan*.¹⁹³

They are not better informed about geography than other sciences. They think all the towns they hear about are so many kingdoms. It takes some time to explain to them that, for example, one can be both French and a native of Narbonne at the same time. I have had people ask in all seriousness if the Kaffirs originally came from France.

¹⁹¹ There is an editorial cross-reference here to another text.

¹⁹² In the original, *hoc* (for 5) is probably a typesetting error and should be *ha*. Bruguière's numerals and also the letters of the Thai alphabet were reproduced in the *Annales* (1831) from handwritten script that he supplied.

¹⁹³ *Kot* (โกฏิ, meaning 10,000,000) and *lan* (ล้าน, meaning 1,000,000) have been reversed, probably by the printer.

[169] No Siamese, not even the talapoins, are interested in literature or history. The only works of this nature are the annals of the kingdom. It is said they are exact. They are kept by a mandarin who does not allow everyone to consult them, especially when he is bad-tempered. According to a long-established tradition, the king should be read these annals when he is free of any serious occupation. Almost all the Siamese dabble in medicine, but almost no one studies this science; it is not necessary to take a degree in a university or to sit for examinations; it is enough to be armed with a few herbs and some prescriptions. The first and often the only remedy the Siamese doctors prescribe for their sick is bathing. If you are cold, hot, have a cold, or a fever, you have to bathe. They order bathing in circumstances which would cause a French doctor to tremble, but experience shows that they are often right.¹⁹⁴ On the contrary, it can be proved that treatments following the principles of European medicine are always dangerous and can lead to death. I have seen this with my own eyes. The diet prescribed for sick persons is no less extraordinary than the treatment. In France a very strict diet is prescribed for serious illnesses; here the sick person must eat, even if he is dying; if he refuses to eat, he is forced to do so, and this is what saves him. It is proved that a sick person who insists on taking only beef-tea while having a fever will recover only with difficulty. In Europe, the sick are given fresh fish, poultry, fresh eggs, well-cooked rice and liquids. In Siam, such sustenance makes the illness worse; the sick person is made to eat fresh pork, salty sun-dried fish,¹⁹⁵ [170] lightly cooked rice, and sometimes salted eggs. Chicken meat, in the Indies, is an unhealthy food, as it contains mercury. Siamese doctors rarely take one's pulse. This is quite different from Chinese doctors; they sometimes take half an hour to do so, and are considered very clever in this matter. As for surgery, this is an art almost unknown to our doctors. In this country, the sick often cry out loud over the slightest of infirmities; they say it relieves them.

The Siamese bathe frequently, even when they are well. Their way of bathing is very simple and much more salutary than in Europe. They go down, dressed, into a pool or the river, and pour buckets of water over themselves. They say it is the only way to get rid of the internal heat in their body.

¹⁹⁴ This is a reflection on the attitudes to hygiene prevailing in Europe at the time.

¹⁹⁵ CR. 'There is no doubt but that disease in Siam as in other tropical climates requires a modified course of treatment in which foreigners have much to learn from the natives, but that an analogy is so far lost as to sanction the course here alluded to no one can for a moment admit. Though we are not aware that the Siamese are now in the habit of treating their patients as above mentioned, yet the practise universally prevalent among them of roasting the mother before a hot fire, for two or three weeks after child-birth, is not less barbarous.'

[FIRES]

They like fire as much as water. They light fires everywhere and throw small embers around their houses, which are all made of straw or wood. This imprudence often causes fires. Last year there were up to 11. That occurring in December last burnt down nearly 1,500 houses. When such calamities occur, there is much disorder and tumult. The crowds are huge, and from all sides come the sounds of weeping and confused cries. Some flee with what they have managed to save from the flames, others rush up to carry off everything they can lay their hands on. Some are crushed or suffocated under the debris of their burning houses. Many are smothered under foot, many die, the victims of their foolhardiness or avarice. Old persons and children [171] run the greatest risk; in these sad circumstances everyone just thinks of himself, and the desire to save oneself from danger means little heed is taken of the misfortunes of others. This thought obliterates all others, for it is not among the heathens that one should look for actions of heroic devotion to one's fellows. As much as they are common among Christians, so they are rare among pagans.

If the fire threatens to consume the entire city, the king, the princes and all the mandarins go to the site in person to give appropriate orders. All the elephants are brought; these animals, of prodigious strength, knock down all the houses which the flames have not yet reached and hurl the wreckage afar. They thus stop the fire by removing the materials that sustain it. I should not leave you unaware that the houses of Christians are the only ones the fire spares. This particular protection of Providence in favour of the Christians dates from time immemorial. The pagans acknowledge this; more than once, enraged and urged on by diabolical jealousy, they have tried with their own hands to burn down the Christian quarters, but they have never succeeded; they were confounded, or the fire did not advance.¹⁹⁶

[ETIQUETTE]

Siamese etiquette and politeness are very different from yours. When the Siamese greet one, they join their hands and bring them before their face, sometimes above their head. They sit on the ground or lie down, according to whether the person they are addressing is more or less important in rank. If they have to change position, they walk deeply stooped, or shift on their knees [172] and their hands; if they are in front of a great prince, the *vang-na*¹⁹⁷ or the king, they are always prostrate on their elbow and knees. This posture is very painful if the audience is

¹⁹⁶ CR. 'The Catholics live a little removed from the business and densely populated portions of the city, and generally keep a herd of swine under the house, and in the compound; hence the mud and filth may render their dwellings less combustible than those of the other inhabitants.'

¹⁹⁷ Literally the front palace, which was the residence of the highest-ranking prince in the land, almost always chosen by the king himself.

protracted. Whatever position they take, they always try to place themselves lower than their superiors. When they are talking to an equal, they call him Sir, *than*, and refer to themselves as *kha*, [your] servant.¹⁹⁸ If they speak to a superior, they give him the title My Lord, *chaukha*, but if the superior is very high in rank, they call him *chorap*, meaning ‘please receive my homage’. If they call themselves by the humiliating denomination *dixan* [ดิฉาน], this is a diminutive of *dierexan* [ดิรัชฉาน], meaning animal. At audiences, when a Siamese speaks to his sovereign, he addresses him with the words *thoun-xramong* [ทูลกระหม่อม], meaning placed on my head. If the subject speaks of himself, he refers to himself as *phom* [ผม], [meaning] hair of the head, or else *touli-phrabat* [ฐลีพระบาท], the dust of his divine feet. When they speak about the king among themselves, they give him titles which for sure would not please a French king. For example *khoun-loang*, wet-nurse of the talapoins;¹⁹⁹ *chaoxivith* [เจ้าชีวิต], master of life; *chao-pheendin*, master of the land; *chau-muang*, master or proprietor of the kingdom, the town, etc. In books they call him *phra-ong*, divine personage or god. To reign, in Siamese, is translated as *savenirat* [เสวยราช], meaning eating the people; one also says *saverinaja sombat* [เสวยราชสมบัติ], meaning enjoyer or dispenser of wealth.²⁰⁰ One does not say of a mandarin that he is governor of such a town; one says ‘he eats the town’,²⁰¹ and often this is closer to the truth than one might think.²⁰²

The Siamese always speak in the third person [173] either when they are speaking to someone or when they refer to themselves. When they reply affirmatively (it is very rare that they say no), they simply repeat the title of the person questioning them. For example ‘Have you done such a thing?’ ‘My lord.’ They have personal pronouns, but rarely use them. *Kou* is the same as ‘I’, ‘me’, and designates the pride or anger of the person using it. *Meung*, meaning ‘thou’, is very offensive. *Man*, meaning ‘him’, is scarcely better. The king, speaking of himself, says *kha*,

¹⁹⁸ *Kha* has different meanings in different contexts. In this case, it is one of many first-person pronouns.

¹⁹⁹ This passage must be corrupted, possibly at the source. *Khun-luang* ขุนหลวง is a generic term for a king.

²⁰⁰ Bruguière has confused the *rat* (ราช) element (meaning ‘royal’) in *saowoei ratcha sombat* เสวยราชสมบัติ with the homonym *rat* ราษฎร that means ‘people’, thus erroneously translating the compound term as ‘eating the people’.

²⁰¹ The Thai administrative term *kin müang* กินเมือง literally means to ‘eat’ or ‘consume’ the town or polity, but should be read more in the sense of ‘living off the land’, since provincial governors and other officials received no salaries and, in a generally non-monetary economy, were expected to extract their revenues from local resources. The term *sawoei ratcha sombat* has a similar meaning in the royal language, when expressing the relationship between a king and his realm.

²⁰² Some of the information in this paragraph, derived second - or third - hand one suspects, is inaccurate.

meaning ‘your servant’. He refers to the people he is addressing by the titles they have been awarded. Women are commonly referred to as *Nang*, which is like the French word ‘madame’. When someone is over thirty he is fairly routinely called *thachei* [*thao kae* ๓๗๓๓], old man, for anyone who has no other title.

The magistrates and all those of rank position themselves in a raised place away from their inferiors. They always have cushions to rest on. They sit down or lie down, as they wish. The most noble position consists in putting the right leg on the left knee, and to hold one’s foot with one’s hand. The king, when he grants an audience, is placed on a high gilded dais; his seat is enclosed by mirrors,²⁰³ and the participants are prostrate on a rich carpet stretching the whole length and breadth of the hall. If presents are offered to the king, they are spread in front of the donor. The audience hall is square and very large, painted red with some designs in gold. There are no seats, and no furnishings except some crystal glassware and rather fine chandeliers. It is said that a European ambassador, granted audience by the king, was [174] very surprised when he was told not to stand up; as he could see no seat on which to sit, he at once decided, being a man of resolution, to stretch out at full length in front of the king. The monarch, in despair at seeing someone else take up such a noble posture, quickly had a seat brought for him.

Important people usually ask only three questions of foreigners who visit for the first time. They are always of little importance and sometimes ridiculous; but before anything else they ask you your age. Siamese of lesser importance do not ask more witty questions; I have met some who, after asking my age, as custom requires, overwhelmed me with very impertinent questions, like ‘Are you God?’,²⁰⁴ “Are you very rich?”, “How many times a day do you eat?”, “Can you pray, can you preach to us in your language?” etc.

The Cochinchinese greet one by joining the hands at the fingertips, bringing them down to the knees, bowing, getting up, and bringing their hands to their head. They perform this ceremony standing. The Chinese salute [an important person] more or less in their usual fashion, but in the grand salutation they go down on their knees one before the other and bow their head to the ground many times. When greeting the Emperor of China, one stands with one’s head covered, but you cannot look directly at him; when a mandarin speaks to him, he concentrates his attention on one of the buttons of his jacket. Imperial majesty does not allow a monarch to address one of his subjects who is not of sufficient rank. When he wants to speak to a mere individual, he has a button given to him to be placed in his bonnet, and

²⁰³ No other description, to our knowledge, of the Siamese throne has this detail. He may be referring to mirror-mosaic decoration.

²⁰⁴ He probably asked *Than pen phra mai?* (Are you a priest/monk?). Bruguère’s insistence on mistranslating *phra* as god (which is only one of the word’s meanings and depends on circumstances) leads to manifest absurdities of his making.

in this way raises him to the rank of mandarin. The emperor has always 24 mandarins in front of him; when the monarch [175] laughs, they laugh too and stop at the same time as him. If he is sad, all their faces are sad and serious; it is as though their faces were on springs and the emperor had the secret of making them move when he desired it. To take one's hat off to a Chinese is to insult him. In Peking, the priests have obtained permission to celebrate mass with the heads covered with a bonnet. I have seen some people from Peking attending mass; they were on their knees, arms hanging down, and head covered, though the holy sacrament was on view; for them this is the most modest and respectful posture. In Siam, when the king dismisses his officials, they have to join their hands, and bow their heads to the ground three times. Etiquette requires that they each have a white cloth spread in front of them. In Burma, when the mandarins leave an audience, they join their hands behind their backs until they are out of the audience hall.

[MEALS]

The Siamese eat at seven in the morning and about five or six in the evening; at midday respectable people have a light meal. They have neither tables nor chairs; the meal is laid out on a mat or a carpet; before serving, the dishes are placed in large brass receptacles. These are covered with a lid shaped like a cone. The meat is cut into small pieces and placed in porcelain dishes sometimes smaller than a saucer. They have neither spoons, nor forks, nor knives; they have just a small mother-of-pearl spoon for taking food from the dishes, and their fingers do everything else. Quite often their nails are used as knives, toothpicks and to clean their ears. The Siamese like highly spiced stews; fresh pork, fish, fruits, preserves and pastries are the ordinary dishes of [176] the rich; the poor make do with a handful of cheap rice and a little dried fish. They sometimes eat a kind of earth which they fry; it is a very unhealthy food.²⁰⁵ For drink the Siamese take water; they also drink a lot of tea. Low class people often abuse a liquor they call *lau* or *arac*; it is distilled from rice, and is an extremely dangerous liquor. The king and the princes have a horror of all people who drink *arac*. A mandarin suspected of taking it would be disgraced.²⁰⁶ To drink in turn the sauce in a communal dish is a mark of Siamese

²⁰⁵ This *din-niao* was until recently still consumed in the North-East.

²⁰⁶ CR. 'Ten years ago it was a rare thing to see a Siamese intoxicated, but so fearful has been the growth of intemperance that in 1832 a Chinese paid to the Siamese government for the 'spirit farm', or the licence of manufacturing ardent spirits for the city of Bangkok for one year *forty-five peculs of silver*, or \$96,000. This is exclusive of the expense of material, and the labor in the manufacture, when it is retailed to the people for less than sixpence a pint. From this may be formed some idea of the quantity consumed. It is now no uncommon thing to see the Siamese, even the nobles and the priesthood, intoxicated.' [A picul was equal to 4,000 baht-weight of silver, or approximately 60 kg. Eds.]

politeness. The king is distinguished from his subjects only by the sumptuousness of his table service. No one can enter the palace kitchen when food is being prepared; an official who has the monarch's confidence has the dishes sealed and goes with them to the dining room. Only the king breaks the seals; but before touching the food, he has everything presented to him tasted by an official; only after this precaution does he dare eat.

Mealtimes are sacred for the Siamese. If the master needs his slave for an urgent matter when the slave is eating, he waits until he has finished, or calls someone else. Even the king respects this practice. I have yet to get my cleric to interrupt his dinner: if he is eating when I need him to give the sacraments to a dying person, I have to make use of someone else, because he will reply laconically 'I am eating.' Although the Siamese are not fussy over the selection of food, they appear to be fastidious when compared to the Chinese and Cochinchinese.

These [latter] people delight in stews [177] of dogs, worms, rats, lizards, snakes, and silkworms. Hatching eggs, when the chicken is already formed, are greatly in demand, and are usually served only to princes and mandarins. They also eat birds' nests. I would like to add that the Cochinchinese eat with delight the vermin which are found in great numbers in their hair, but I am afraid of making you feel sick.

They love raw fish, when it is still alive. It is good manners, for them, to fill the mouth when eating; instead of spoons and forks, they use two small round sticks shaped like a spindle. They make fun of Europeans because they drink milk and eat cheese, and because they are completely put out if they do not have in their hands a knife, a spoon, and a fork. I forgot to tell you that the Chinese always in their meals offer the first morsel to the devil.

For the last few years opium, which was unknown in Siam and all the countries nearby, has become one of the most important articles of trade. Everyone takes this dangerous sap, smoking it as if it were tobacco. I do not know if, in the ports, one could find a man of modest circumstances who did not use it.²⁰⁷ Governments may well prohibit it, but the force of habit is stronger than fear of punishment. Every day one sees the unfortunate effects of opium, and people prefer to kill themselves with it, rather than deprive themselves of it. Up to now, I have not heard it said that Christians have contracted this untoward habit, but it is widespread among the heathens, and herein lies another difficulty relating to their conversion. No [178] missionary baptizes a Christian convert under instruction if he has not yet given

²⁰⁷ CR. 'We could not adopt the statement "I do not know a person in these parts who does not take it." It would be a large estimate to suppose that there was ever a time when one fourth of the population used opium, and the stringent measures adopted by his majesty during the last few years have greatly lessened the number of that proportion.'

up using opium. There is a good number who have generously made this sacrifice, howsoever painful it might be. It is the Europeans who have encouraged the use of opium throughout East Asia.²⁰⁸ They sell to these poor natives, for a very high price, the poison which will cause their death, and makes them commit many crimes to obtain some.

To accumulate merit, the Siamese must have a big stomach and eat to excess. If a man like this passes in the street, you hear the good Siamese cry out in admiration, “Oh, how much merit this man has!”²⁰⁹ The present king did not think it necessary to give a more convincing proof of this than that of the queen mother, in relating the quantity of fruit she ate at her dinner. It is as though this people do not know how to appreciate the merit of someone without scales and a measure in their hands. The peoples in Siam share this prejudice, and extend it in the judgement of the merit of other objects. Thus when they hear you say that such a picture, such a statue, are masterpieces, they say to you without guile ‘Are they therefore very big?’ If a man has all the advantages we have just spoken of, and adds that of having a very square stature, a broad flat face, almost no nose, small slit eyes, very black teeth, nails three inches long, a long plait of hair, this individual is, in Chinese eyes, a person who combines in his person the perfection of all times, the ideal of what is handsome, beauty par excellence. If a Chinese so built appears before his compatriot holding a fan in one hand and a long red pipe in the other, all those present [179] hasten to show him marks of respect and veneration. ‘How that man is favoured by the heavens,’ they say to each other. ‘Look at those fine black nails! Admire that huge stomach!’ You think this is a joke? It is absolutely true. A Chinese Christian assured me that one of his compatriots owed his fortune to the length of his nails. The Burmese tattoo or paint their bodies; they say that such a fine painting gives a man a martial air.

[SIAMESE PREJUDICES]

If so many practices and prejudices opposed to yours are rather shocking for you, be aware that there are many things among the Europeans which displease Asians. For example, they despise Europeans because they have large noses, blond hair, white teeth, pink cheeks, and mostly big blue eyes. They show their scorn quite openly. They find it odd that Europeans bite their nails; but it is the subject of blue eyes which troubles them most. They hate all animals with eyes that are bluish. Some time ago, a thief stole a horse from a Christian, but returned it the next day, because he noticed that this horse had eyes rather like a European – that

²⁰⁸ The text has *haute Asie*, upper Asia. Unfortunately, this assertion is correct.

²⁰⁹ Bruguière may have been misled here by another homonym, mistaking a comment that a person is *sombun* (ສມບູນ, a polite way of saying portly) for the two separate elements *som* (ສມ, full of) and *bun* (ບຸນ, Buddhist merit).

is the reason he gave. Although it was eleven at night when I arrived in Bangkok, the seminary students came to pay me a visit, and soon noticed I had blue eyes. This did not please them, and they went to rejoin their fellows to transmit this disagreeable news. Our dress, our way of sitting, and eating, the European habit of going for walks, makes them laugh greatly at our expense. It often happened when I was taking a walk, that [180] a great number of people ran to see the extraordinary thing I was doing. One of them once asked the person accompanying me, ‘What is that Christian doing, always walking backwards and forwards in the same place?’ But they cannot hide their indignation when they see European ladies sit down at table, leave their houses, go for walks, and ride horses. ‘What!’ they say, ‘how can a civilized nation tolerate such abuses? Can one even think that a man has so little consideration of himself to allow a woman to eat with him?’ The Chinese are those who most rail against this practice.

[DEATH RITES]

When a Siamese dies, the relatives put the body in a well-closed coffin. They do not take it out through the door, but go into the street through a hole made in the wall. They take the body three times around the house, running as quickly as they can. They believe that if they did not take this precaution, the dead person would remember the path it had taken, and would return in the night to play a nasty trick on the family. Once at the funeral pyre, the relatives open the coffin and give the body to the person whose task it is to burn it, in return for a coin which is carefully placed in the mouth of the deceased. The *sampareu*²¹⁰ as this person is called, washes the face with coconut milk. If the deceased decided before his death to be eaten by the vultures and crows, the *sampareu* cuts the body in pieces and gives the flesh to the birds of prey, which make sure they arrive early for the ceremony; this is why the Siamese have placed these birds among the angels.²¹¹ After this horrible and disgusting operation, the fleshless skeleton is thrown into the flames. Sometimes [181] the sinews are contracted by the heat of the fire, and the corpse stands up or jumps out of the pyre. The *sampareu* tries hard to retain it with iron pitchforks, but often it escapes. The spectacle of the convulsions made by the corpse is a truly frightful sight; the mouth goes through horrible contortions, the eyes come out of their sockets, grease flows freely and gives off an intolerable stench. For his part, the *sampareu* works at this blue-black skeleton. It is like witnessing a scene in hell. The relatives take part in this ceremony dressed for mourning. For important bereavements, the Siamese dress in white and shave their heads.

²¹⁰ Undertaker (*sapparoe* สัปเหร่อ).

²¹¹ CR. ‘The Siamese are in the habit of burning their dead, and the place selected for this purpose is near the wats; but the case here related where “the flesh was cut from the body and given to the vultures” must have been an uncommon one.’

As soon as the king of Siam dies, his face is covered by a gold mask; several thousand talapoins come in turn to pray by the corpse.²¹² Some time before the day determined for the funeral, the new king authorizes public festivities and distributes money to the poor for the repose of the dead person's soul. Instead of making this distribution individually, they throw payable-on-sight notes [*chalak*, ฉลาก], or put many coins in fruits, and throw them into the middle of the crowd, which results in many of the spectators being crushed to death. The dead king's body is placed on a magnificent bed for lying in state. The bed is placed on a gilded hearse, with guards all around, some dressed as elephants and tigers, others as giants. The chief of the talapoins also mounted on a gilded chariot, conducts the ceremony, and comes before the king. These two chariots are pulled by men. A prince of the royal house heads the mourners. He is armed with a large receptacle full of rice, which he throws to both sides as the procession advances. The king, the princes and all the [182] mandarins constitute the cortege. The palace women, numbering several thousand, follow; they try, as best they can, to express grief which they really do not feel at all: they weep, cry out and sob. To do this, they use a violent means which forces them to shed tears.²¹³ Nothing is missing from the spectacle unless it be the sincerity of their feelings. They relate, in the most elegant and refined terms, the great actions of the monarch who has just died; they recall his justice, his tenderness, his administration and all his qualities; they are full of praise in commonplace terms about the prosperity of his reign and the next. Although the way these ladies express the funeral oration for the monarch is hardly appropriate to cause tears to be shed, yet the good Siamese, who pay more attention to the form rather than the substance, willingly cry too. Actually, the voices and cries of the women can be heard, but they themselves cannot be seen; they are in a gallery covered by a tapestry hanging. The new king lights the pyre. An ordinary frame is not used for this ceremony; they use a flame caused by a flash of lighting, which is preciously stored. If the flames go straight into the sky, the king is in heaven; if it wobbles, that is a bad sign. They are careful to choose a day when there is no wind. The amphitheatre where the bodies of monarchs are burnt comprises several columns and many pavilions placed one on top of the other in ever-diminishing size. The bones which are not completely burnt are collected and reduced to powder. This is made into a kind of paste and small statues are made with it. These statues are placed in a temple given over [183] to that.²¹⁴ The king often goes to see them and

²¹² King Rama I was cremated in May 1811 and King Rama II in April 1825. Monsignor Florens and others of the Bangkok mission may have witnessed these ceremonies and provided Bruguière with the details he records here.

²¹³ Evidently the reader is expected to imagine what this means might be, since we are not told.

²¹⁴ The Phra Thepphabidòn or Royal Pantheon is not a temple but a building in the palace grounds, where the ashes of the kings are enshrined.

honour them like gods. It is permitted to ordinary individuals also to make statues from the bones of their relatives, but they cannot put them in temples.

On the death of the king, all his subjects, men and women, have to shave their heads and wear mourning. On the death of the queen, only the women and officials of her household wear mourning.

Chinese funeral ceremonies are very different from those of the Siamese. As soon as a Chinese dies, the son has to buy from the devil the water he needs to wash the face of the dead person. But this devil is so stupid he thinks pieces of paper covered with a thin sheet of copper are genuine gold. Then the tablet for the soul is made, that is, one writes on a plank 'Here resides the soul of so-and-so', and they really believe the soul is located in the characters. The form followed at funerals is as follows. A bonze heads the procession and bangs two pans together while reciting a few prayers, so that no evil spirit will stop the dead person on the way. Another buys from the devil the right of way, but always pays in paper money. The bonze is followed by four men in ceremonial dress, carrying on a bier the soul, or tablet, of the deceased. The soul rests in a rather pretty pavilion with four columns. Two small, magnificently attired children stand on the sides. Next comes the dead person, placed in a rich coffin. Behind the corpse is a bonze swathed in a red scarf. The relatives and the rest of the escort conclude the procession. Care is taken to carry the coffin in such a way that the feet of the dead person are always in front; without this precaution the dead man could readily observe [184] the house he has left; this must be meticulously avoided, for fear he does not return the next night to strangle one of his relatives. If the procession comes to a bridge, great care has to be taken not to cross it without asking for permission from the evil spirit which rules over it. The dead person might be compromised by this spirit who could cause plenty of trouble for it in the next world. To prevent this misfortune the relatives openly declare the purpose of the journey. They ask for forgiveness for importuning the spirit, or pay to it their dues, a few paper candles. On receiving this modest payment, the dead person continues on its way in complete safety.

The tombs of the Chinese are oven-shaped, and the entrance is closed by a huge stone on which is written the name of the deceased. Usually there is in front of the tomb a small paved enclosure. Two or three days after interment, relatives come to visit the place where the body has been interred. This is called making the tomb perfect. On certain days of the lunar calendar, they light small candles in front of the tomb's entrance. I saw this superstitious ceremony in Macao.

The procession, on returning, brings back the soul's tablet. It is placed in a kind of chapel called the hall of the ancestors. The ancestors are given three cups of tea every day. Visits are paid to them and they are saluted on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, on the day they were born and the day they died, and every time a matter of serious importance is in the offing. On all these occasions small

candles are lit in front of the tablets. Twice a year a big meal is offered to all the dead relatives, but only the living eat the [185] food, the dead making do with the smell. At the end of the ceremony the dead are dismissed and sent back to the other world. This feast lasts several days. If a young man dies before having contracted the marriage with his fiancée, she may, if she wishes, marry the tablet of the dead man. The ceremony is the same as for a real marriage. Often the relatives, fearing that the soul of the deceased has no means in the other world and might be reduced to being hungry, take care to send him a residence complete with clothes, servants, money, and above all pigs. Moreover the expense is not ruinous, since everything is made of paper, which is converted in the next world into gold, into furniture, houses, horses and men, but the paper has first to be reduced to ashes.

The emperors of the present dynasty began to construct their tombs from the first day of their reign. Usually they hollow out a mountain and build in it a town and an underground palace, so that everything will be ready when they go to inhabit it after their death.

In the province of Canton, as soon as the relatives have completed the funeral ceremonies, they send for a magician to learn from him what is the day the deceased has chosen to smother one of the members of his family; the sorcerer selects any old day. The relatives, forewarned, set up a table loaded with choice victuals in a separate room, which is carefully shut up. On the designated day, the ghost invisibly enters the room prepared for it, and invisibly eats. After the meal, it reflects on the evil nature of the action it is about to commit; it thinks of the great ingratitude it would show in putting to death [186] people who had treated it so well. These thoughts calm it, it returns to the other world, and the relatives do not need be afraid any more. The Cochinchinese we have in Bangkok observe the same funeral ceremonies as the Chinese, except that they carry a small idol. When they arrive at the burial site the relatives sit down on the ground and the deceased passes over them.

[MEASUREMENT OF TIME AND ASTROLOGY]

The Siamese have two eras, one civil, the other used only by the talapoints; they are now in their twelfth century of their common era, that is, the year 1191.²¹⁵ They have a period of twelve years, which they start again when one cycle is completed; they call this period *rop* [ร๑น], that is, cycle. Each of three years has the name of one of the twelve constellations of the zodiac. All this comes from China. In order, their names are 1. the year of the rat, 2. the cow, 3. the tiger, 4. the hare,

²¹⁵ The year 1191 of the Chulasakkarat (Lesser Era) began on 13 April 1829 and ended on 12 April 1830. This observation indicates that Bruguière's essay was written no earlier than mid-April 1829.

5. the big snake, 6. the small snake, 7. the horse, 8. the goat, 9. the monkey, 10. the chicken, 11. the dog, 12. the pig. They have two years; one is religious and begins on the first lunar day in December, the other is lay and begins more or less on the first lunar day of April.²¹⁶

The year 1828 corresponds to the year of the pig.²¹⁷ Their year comprises twelve lunar months. The first two have a special name [*ai* อ้าย (also called *chiang* เชียง) and *yi* ยี่], and the others are designated by the ordinal number in which they appear, that is, third month, fourth month [and so on]. If you ask a Siamese in what year and what month he was born, he will reply, 'In the fifth month of the year of the chicken.' 'I undertook such and such a journey on the fifth lunar month in the year of the horse,' etc [187]. Every three years, the year has 13 months; then they observe a second eighth month, which corresponds to our month of July.²¹⁸ They have weeks like us; Sunday is the first day of their week, and which they call the day of the sun, and Monday is the day of the moon. The other days have the names of certain stars which I suspect are planets; in this case the days of their weeks would have the same names as those of the ancient Romans. The ordinary day is divided into eight parts of three hours each, which they call *jam* [ยาม]. The *jam* of the artificial day²¹⁹ are divided into three *mong* [โมง], or three of our hours. Night-time hours are called *thum* [ทุ่ม]. The *mong* and the *thum* contain three *malica* [นาฬิกา],²²⁰ each *malica* comprises eight *bat* [บาท], the *bat* is divided into 16 *nathi* [นาทิจ],²²¹ the *nathi* being the last division of time among the Siamese, our hour containing 384.²²²

²¹⁶The Thai calendar is much more complex than Bruguère suggests, but he was probably trying to simplify his explanation for his reader. The lunar month Margasirsha in the Buddhist calendar is called the 'first' month in the central Thai calendar, but it is not the beginning of the year. When Bruguère was in Bangkok, this month began in November or December. The Thai new year (Songkran) is, moreover, a solar event (the moment in April when the sun enters Aries), which helps to keep the lunar months aligned with the seasons.

²¹⁷ The year 1828 (a year of the rat) must be a typographical error for 1827, which was a year of the pig.

²¹⁸ By adding an intercalary month (always a second eighth month, or second Ashada in the Buddhist calendar), seven times in nineteen years (not once in three years, and not in a simple mathematical way), the lunar calendar is further aligned to the seasons. In the Chinese lunar calendar, however, the intercalary months are inserted in a different way.

²¹⁹ Sic. The division is artificial, the day is not.

²²⁰ Bruguère appears to be in error here, as 1 *nalika* (a Sanskrit term) should be the same as one hour. The hour was divided into 10 *bat*, and thus 1 *bat* was equal to about 6 minutes.

²²¹ *Nathi* means minute in modern usage.

²²² Bruguère's calculations are mathematically correct, but these tiny increments of time were of concern only to astrologers. In the Fifth Reign the Western system of calculating time was adopted.

All these intervals and names which seem ridiculous to us are not so for them. As the Siamese are extremely superstitious and much given to judgmental astrology, they say that these names help them to know which year, which month, which day of the moon or week are good to go on a journey, or when it would be dangerous to continue it. They maintain they can determine the fate of a baby born, for example, in the year of the tiger or what would be the propensities of someone who came into the world in the year of the hare.

They have other portents derived from animals or birds. Often an ordinary incident is enough to upset all their plans and make them change what had been decided.

[YEARLY FESTIVALS]

I have spoken to you already about some Siamese festivals and ceremonies, but not about all of them. I am going [188] to give you a kind of calendar with them all, according to their importance and their relationship with the moon, because with the Siamese, as with other heathen nations, the moon is the main object and the basis of their superstitious religion.²²³

1. The 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd days of the lunar month are holy days for the Siamese; they call them Lord's days.²²⁴ Fishing, hunting and all other occupations of similar nature are strictly forbidden on these days. Neither meat nor fish can be bought in the market. Infringers are given a fine and, in addition, a flogging.²²⁵ The whole court that day should wear a white langouti. There is, though, a place where meat can be bought, provided it is not for the talapoins.

2. The 1st and 15th lunar days, [there is] praying at the court and everywhere when the talapoins are called in. The preaching is nothing if not edifying; the previous day all the talapoins shave their heads and eyebrows.

3. The first three lunar days in April are solemn holidays for faithful Siamese. Those days Lucifer opens the gates to hell; the souls of the deceased shut up there come out to eat a meal on the earth with members of their family; they are splendidly received. On one of these days one of the talapoins goes to the palace to preach in front of the king; at the end of the sermon, at a given sign, the cannons in all parts of the town are fired, to chase the devil outside the city walls or kill it if it dare resist. From the first day a temporary king is named, with the title *phaja-*

²²³ This seems to be a foolish argument, like stating that the sun is the basis of Christian superstition since Europeans adopted a solar calendar.

²²⁴ That is, *wan phra*, holy days.

²²⁵ CR. 'This account would lead one to suppose the Siamese to be more strict observers of their Sundays than the facts will warrant. It would be difficult to discover less business on that day than any other, though perhaps it is true that there may be more drunkenness and dissipation.'

phollathep [พระยาพลเทพ]. He enjoys for these three days all the royal prerogatives (the real king remains shut up in his palace);²²⁶ he forms a [189] a guard of honour from all the galley slaves in the kingdom. A flag precedes him and he walks to the sound of music. Everything he sees during his procession belongs to him; everything in the market or in the shops which are not closed is confiscated for his use. He also sells for his benefit the vessels which enter the port in those three days. On the first day he goes, in imitation of the ceremony which takes place the same day in the emperor's²²⁷ palace, to a field located close to a pagoda. He marks out a few furrows with a gilded plough, and then goes to lean on a tree-trunk, places his right foot on his left knee and stands upright on his other foot. This is why he is called the hop-scotch king. Whilst the *phaja* has this noble and practical posture, one of his officials sows rice, beans and a variety of peas. After this, three cows are brought to the field which has just been sown. The first type of seeds one of these cows eats will be very expensive during the year. The public is therefore sufficiently prepared, and everyone takes precautions.

4. At the beginning of the lunar month of July, the monarch sends in great pomp to the talapoins water-lily flowers and small packets of wood to pick their teeth with and to clean their gums.

5. The 15th of the lunar month of July, the general ordination of the talapoins occurs, at the beginning of their Lent. At this time of the year the talapoins have their greatest freedom, eat excessively and commit all sorts of crimes.²²⁸

6. The 15th of the lunar month of February is the talapoins' Easter. They call it *passa* in their language.²²⁹ This festival lasts about six weeks. It is in this period [190] that the king, accompanied by all his court, goes in extraordinary pomp to the chief temples, to greet the talapoins and give them new robes.²³⁰ The people celebrate the solemnity of this festival with all sorts of excesses. Unrestrained licence prevails everywhere.

[THE CROWN AND THE PALACE]

The Siamese state is monarchical and feudal. In the capital and nearby everything is done directly in the name of the king, but in distant provinces nothing is done but in the name of the governors, whose rank is hereditary. In Siam, the

²²⁶ CR. 'This must be taken with many important limitations.'

²²⁷ The use of 'emperor' seems to imply that the annual royal ploughing ceremony in Bangkok took place on the same day that the same ceremony was held in Beijing.

²²⁸ No proof or examples are provided.

²²⁹ *Phansa* is actually the word for the Buddhist Lent or rainy-season retreat. Here, Bruguière appears to be referring to October (not February) and the fifteenth day of the lunar month, which marks the end of the rainy season retreat, or *òk phansa*.

²³⁰ The presentation of new robes (or *thòt kathin*) takes place during the 30 days following the end of the Lent, which lasts three months.

crown is inherited, but the eldest in the royal family does not succeed as of right, and the king has the option of choosing his successor. This manner of elevation often causes trouble in the palace. Each of the monarch's wives aspires to becoming queen mother. Intrigues are formed, and the different parties use all sorts of means to place on the throne the prince they favour. This mostly occurs when the reigning king dies without having named a successor. It does not seem, though, that these court intrigues ever produce open ruptures. If the state is shaken by revolutions, the cause nearly always comes from the discontent of the people, revolt by governors, the ambition of individuals, and often foreign wars. I do not know what was the situation of this kingdom 50 years ago, but since then, and especially since the death of the ill-fated Constance,²³¹ so cruelly murdered by those he had laden with bounties (Constance was not an ambitious adventurer, as some French historians have given out);²³² since that time, as I was saying, it has been exposed to many revolutions; in less than 40 years we have seen three [191] different dynasties.²³³ Only the Christians have shown inviolable fidelity to their legitimate sovereigns. Not one has, in all these upheavals, sided with the rebels; although they were persecuted by these same rulers, they were always their last resource.

When a prince is declared king, he has to make, with all the pomp of royalty, a tour of the capital's walls. He is carried on a litter, which is like a day bed. He throws into the middle of the crowd a great quantity of small coins. I shall return to this ceremony. When the king leaves the palace, which occurs but rarely, he is preceded by an official who carries a rod in his hands; this official has orders to keep the crowds at a distance. The death penalty is exacted of anyone who approaches the monarch without having obtained permission. One has to stay at a great distance and prostrate one's head to the ground. You have to be careful not to choose a raised viewpoint; if you do, you run the risk of losing your life, even if you are lying with your belly on the ground. On one occasion, a sentry on duty on the ramparts did not have the time to come down when the king was passing, and was about to be put to death, but the king, who is by nature kind, pardoned him. You would be very badly received in Siam if you went in haste to the monarch to greet him with cheers. Siamese who are very familiar with court etiquette flee when they hear the signal announcing the approach of the king. In all Asian lands, the kings and their subjects live separate from each other, fear each other and flee

²³¹ Constantine Phaulkon, a Greek who rose to high office at the end of the reign of King Narai (1656–88), was killed by the son of Narai's successor Phetracha, who conducted a palace coup on 18 May 1688; Narai died in June. Opinions are sharply divided on the character of Phaulkon.

²³² The point is disputed.

²³³ The number 40 must be a typesetting error. About 60 years earlier (1767), the Ayutthaya dynasty came to an end, followed by the rise of Taksin, who was succeeded in 1782 by the founder of the current dynasty.

from each other. The King of Siam does not allow his children²³⁴ who have reached the age of 13 or 14 to remain in the [192] palace. He has a house set up for them. When they come to the audience or when they attend any ceremonies, they must always be in a separate place at a great distance from the king.

The palace in which the king lives comprises several separate structures, hardly more elaborate than a middle-class house; the architecture is very simple. The palace is enclosed by three surrounding walls. The external enclosure and gates in them are put in charge of men. The innermost enclosure is guarded by women. They number about 4,000 and constitute a corps of the army, with its own commander and officers. Those who have the rank of an ordinary soldier keep guard at the main gate, armed with a stick shaped like a musket. These women are not counted among the king's wives; they receive their pay and ranks like soldiers in Europe.

In the third enclosure, guarded by these women, is a curious garden. It is a huge enclosure containing in miniature everything larger in the universe. There are woods, mountains, ploughed fields, rivers, a sea with islands and reefs, warships, merchant vessels of all nations, boats, a town, villages, a market, a stand owned by the palace ladies, a fortress with cannons, temples of all the religions known in Siam, and models representing the different people on earth, with their individual shape and dress. All four-legged animals, all birds, trees and the rarest plants which the king could obtain are all gathered there. The Siamese call this garden *Suan-uthiyam* [*suan utthayan* สวนอุททยาน], meaning [193] garden of delights, or terrestrial paradise; it is on the model of the one in Peking. Since in these Asian palaces are people who have never seen and will never see the world, [and] are locked up, it is thought that they should not be deprived of the consolation of having some idea of it.²³⁵ At night this huge garden is lit up by a vast number of lanterns. The ladies of the harem go into the *Suan-uthayam* and amuse themselves to daybreak if they wish. When some repairs are needed, the workers are issued with a ticket. I have all these details from several Christians whom the king has summoned to work in this unusual garden.

When you pass the pavilion facing the palace,²³⁶ all the oarsman have to be seated and everyone must fold up their sunshades; there are archers posted to ensure that no one fails to do so.

²³⁴ The text has *enfants* ('children'), but the rule applied to males only.

²³⁵ CR. 'It must be but a poor idea of the world, which anyone can gather from a representation of this kind made by a people who know nothing of countries and men beyond their immediate neighborhood. After an examination of a world like this in miniature, one can easily imagine that it may bear a greater resemblance to its prototype in Peking than to the world.'

²³⁶ Here Bruguère seems to describe the floating pavilion that served as the landing place at the front of the palace for the royal barges and other river craft.

The king of Siam eats and walks to the sound of music; that is, in his presence cymbals, drums and timbrels are sounded; a few other vulgar instruments are played at the same time; our musicians produce harsh and bizarre sounds from them, the least annoyance being the monotony. The distinctive signals of royal dignity are 1. the way of hitting the drum which they call *chong-keck*; 2. the gold cloth parasol; 3. the gilded ivory sedan chair with a support on each side in the form of a balustrade. Princes of the blood have only a silk parasol; they can be white, green or red. Their chairs are like the king's, but smaller and less decorated. The first rank of grandees, called *chau-phaja*, has red parasols, but the material is not silk; their chairs are not carved and have no [194] side supports. Important dignitaries of second rank have a red parasol, but their seat is like a folding chair. Ordinary mandarins have neither parasol nor chair. The king gives to princes a box containing five gold receptacles, one for water, one for areca nut, the third for betel, the fourth for lime, the fifth for tobacco. Governors-general receive this box, but the receptacles are silver-gilt. Dignitaries called *phra* receive the box, but the receptacles are only silver; lesser mandarins do not normally receive these distinctive symbols. A mandarin, or any other person of rank, never goes out without an escort; among his men there is always one who carries his parasol, another his betel box, a third his cheroot, a fourth has a lit wick, and sometimes there is a fifth who receives in a spittoon the residue of the mastication of the *phaja*.

After the king, the *vaugna* [*Wang Na*]²³⁷ is the most important person in the realm. He is the commander-in-chief of all the armies when the king is absent; he has more power than the former *connetable* [high constables] of France. He has a palace and his own court, and even the title of second king. The *vauglang*²³⁸ comes immediately after the *vaugna*. These two high positions are not hereditary. The *chao-phaja* are also very powerful; many have hereditary governorships; they have the right to levy taxes in their respective provinces, without being required to give account of them to the king; they are the chief justices; they have to pay some dues; in case of war, they must supply troops. They can be considered as the great vassals of the crown; beneath them are lesser governors or minor vassals. They can be demoted or even condemned to death for felony.

[195] I did not want to give you the details about the coronation ceremony of the King of Siam, before speaking about the grandees and their distinctive external insignia. Now let me describe this ceremony. The whole of the route to be taken

²³⁷ The text consistently has *vaugna*, probably a typographical error. *Wang Na*, meaning the Front Palace, is an informal name. The Prince of the Front Palace was the highest-ranking and usually the most powerful of the princes. The formal name of the palace was Phra Ratcha Wang Bawòn Sathan Mongkhon.

²³⁸ *Wang-lang*, prince of the rear palace.

by the king is bordered on both sides with an infinite number of very rich altars, covered with vases of flowers, pictures, and incense burners in which perfumes are continually burnt. The Chinese mandarins are in charge of this. Archers and officials head the procession, all dressed in their special uniforms; they carry only sticks; their commander is borne on a litter; they are followed by four important mandarins, mounted on horseback and dressed in long robes. They carry crossbows and have many small flags of different colours tied to their backs.²³⁹

The army comes next, walking in two rows. The different regiments are distinguished by special uniforms. They carry muskets and bayonets. The artillery draws up in the rear. The leaders are in the middle of the two ranks. Two Christian officials each have an enormous standard; they are on horseback and dressed in the European fashion. The person who acts as chief general, or *meethop* [แม่ทัพ], wears on this occasion only a turban of I know not how many ells long. His head appears to be as big as a barrel. This turban is white and trimmed with gold braid. The king comes immediately afterwards. From as far as he can be seen, everyone prostrates themselves. All the musicians, placed beside the altars I have described, play their instruments. The Siamese think this music admirable. I shall refrain from contradicting them, but shall not retract what I have said [196] above. The king is seated on a rather rich throne; there are several steps to climb to mount it. This throne is placed beneath a magnificent canopy borne aloft on four columns. One of his officials is positioned before him, holding in his hand a huge fan which he flutters continuously. Two other mandarins, placed on either side of the throne, carry the monarch's huge golden parasols. All that the king wears is a langouti, a rich cloth-of-gold belt, a black felt hat with large turned-down sides. It is perhaps an ell in diameter, topped with a plume, and decorated with gold braid and tassels. The king is the only person with no robe: everyone taking part in the procession—princes, mandarins, soldiers—is decently covered from head to toe. The king has on one side a big scimitar and on the other a large gold vase filled with small silver coins, each worth 65 centimes. In his hand he holds a golden goblet and uses this to dip into the large vase to take the coins and continually throws them into the assembly for as long as his journey lasts. A young prince immediately follows him, doing the same. As these vases are soon empty, next to the monarch are men with sacks of silver to refill them. This lavishness is nothing compared to the quantity of notes [*chalak* ฉลาก] thrown into the crowd. Some are worth the price of a horse, an elephant, a house, a bear, etc. Whoever finds one of these notes has only to present himself to the treasury, and he immediately receives the value of the objects indicated on the note.

²³⁹ This appears to be a description of a Chinese rather than a Siamese mandarin. Bruguère himself did not witness a coronation.

After the king come four princes on horseback, [197] their heads covered with feathered hats. All the other princes of the royal household, numbering 80, follow in procession and end it; they are all accompanied by officials of their households. One of these officials holds the horse's bridle, a second carries a scimitar, a third covers the prince's head with the prince's parasol, others bear betel leaves, areca nut, lime, tobacco, a light etc., without which the Siamese could not last a second. Throughout the time the procession lasts, the *vaugna* [*vangna*] stays in the palace, the entrance to which he guards, holding a naked sword.

When a prince is raised to the rank of *vaugna*, he has to leave the palace he has lived in until then to take possession of the palace which goes with this rank. But when he arrives at the city gate, he finds it shut. He has to unsheath his scimitar and climb onto the ramparts. It is only after doing this that he and his escort can enter the palace reserved for him.²⁴⁰

The ceremonies I have just described, curious as they might be, are not superstitious. This is not really so concerning the king's children who reach the age of puberty.

When a prince of the royal family is 13 or 14, the king, as I mentioned above, assigns a house for him and distances him from his person. But before anything he must put on a new langouti and a talapoin must cut his hair.²⁴¹ For this, the most qualified persons among the four nations in Siam are brought to the court; each has to wear the costume of his country. A kind of mountain is created with a path going to the top. Their tents are erected [198] at the summit of this mountain. A little below figures of one or two elephants are placed from which water issues; this water falls into a receptacle right at the bottom of the artificial mountain. When everything is ready, the mandarins and soldiers line up in two rows. The cortege leaves the palace in this order to make a rather long procession. The prince for whom this ceremony is performed is seated on his chair carried on the backs of his officials. On his head he wears a very high but not pointed bonnet; he has slippers on his feet; his arms are covered with gold bracelets. In front of him a kind of frame of bells is shaken, as if to signify he is still a child. An instrument like a flute is played, as are tambourines and trumpets. The princess who is to become his wife walks before him, with hands clasped; she holds, between the thumb and first finger, a bunch of peacock's feathers. When the procession enters the palace, the prince goes to prostrate himself at the feet of his father, the king; the king takes him by the hand and leads him into the temple where rest the ashes of his ancestors. The young prince salutes them, or

²⁴⁰ This is a little confusing, since the prince's original palace is likely to have been within the city walls. One suspects that all these passages about court rituals are second-hand, supplied by an informant.

²⁴¹ Contrary to Bruguière's assumption, this was a Brahmin ceremony for cutting the top-knot—the ceremonial tonsure that took place on the symbolic Mount Kailasa.

rather worships them. This ceremony is repeated for three consecutive days. The fourth day the talapoin cuts his hair in the ancestors' temple, and he is given the white langouti, instead of the red one worn before in the ceremony. The same day he goes to the artificial mountain, always accompanied by a great throng, washes in the receptacle, and then climbs in the company of three or four grandees to the top of the mountain, and enters the pavilion. What does he do there? No one knows, except those who accompany him. It is believed that more superstitious ceremonies take place there. This has much in common with the ceremonies practiced [199] by the Romans when their male children took the *toga virilis*.

In Siam, court etiquette requires that the king has a soothsayer close by him. The monarch consults him about the success of a war, the results of a battle and other instances, which often place the poor soothsayer in difficulties: when he happens to be reasonably correct, the king pays him generously. If the prediction proves false, the monarch has the bastinado inflicted on him or has him placed in that state in the burning sun, to teach him to be more circumspect in the future. This soothsayer, who sometimes predicts what he himself should do, announced some time back that a Christian village would be burnt on such a day. In order not to be accused of ignorance on this occasion, he sent one of his trusties to set the place on fire; fortunately the agent was arrested at the very moment when he was going to carry out his commission. He revealed the whole plot, and the soothsayer received a severe bastinado; but all the same retained the king's confidence. According to an ancient custom, the King of Siam has a treasure which he should not touch except in exceptional circumstances. His successor always adds to what his predecessor has already amassed. The present king is said to be very rich. It would seem that all Asiatic monarchs do likewise. The Emperor of China has melted down every year minted coin to the value of about 30 million francs. These ingots are the shape of big square bricks. The monarch has all this bullion sent to Tartary and has it thrown into a pool he has had dug near a river. Mandarins and a considerable number of troops guard this treasure. This is the destiny of the enormous sums the Europeans regularly send each year to Canton, to receive [200] in exchange some silks, some porcelain much inferior to that in France, and tea. It would seem to me to have been better for all this money to have remained buried in the bowels of the earth; at least miserable slaves would have been spared much hard labour.

[THE ARMY]

In these countries the rights of man are not the same as in Europe. War is waged as did formerly the Assyrians. Towns are destroyed, the countryside is laid waste, and the inhabitants are led away in captivity. In the suburbs of Bangkok can be seen villages composed of Burmans, Peguans [Mon], Laotians [Lao], Malays, etc. These devastations are equally disastrous to the vanquished as to the vanquish-

ers. In the course of a single campaign, which took place last year and lasted only six months, the number of men who died of hunger, exhaustion, destitution and sickness is uncountable.²⁴²

The military profession is hereditary and more or less within the same rank. It is not known here what is to disband troops. One is a soldier until one dies. The Siamese have no uniform, or to be more exact, the Siamese have a uniform only when under arms. The different regiments are distinguished by the colour of the uniform.²⁴³ The chiefs have a uniform of a short silk robe brocaded in gold. The Christians are dressed in the European manner; they are all either engineers or officers in the medical corps, or governors. They are very incompetent in their profession. Some of them concede that without the particular protection of providence, they would have been victims of their ignorance; yet it is they who know the most. They say the Siamese do not lack courage, but they have no knowledge of military arts. [201] At the moment of departure, the army gets into small boats and positions itself in the middle of the river. The talapoins, who are everywhere, consult the omens, pray to the devil, have the general lift one foot, then the other; they make him perform a thousand other apish antics of this nature. One of them climbs into a very high chair, and from there throws buckets of a kind of lustral water over the entire army. The Christian soldiers stay to one side, though, so as not to receive this infernal water; the king has nothing to say about this. They erect a figurine, which represents the prince or the rebel they are going to fight; previously it was [not a figurine but] a criminal condemned to the ultimate penalty; the present king, who is very humane, has substituted a figurine. The executioner deals a mighty blow on its head with an axe; if its head falls at the first strike, the omen is favourable; if not, the augury is poor. When the ceremony is over, the general proudly unsheathes his scimitar, and the army marches off to the sound of all kinds of instruments. Although the Siamese are close observers of omens on all occasions, they are still more so in matters concerning war: the flight of a bird, the cry of some animal is enough to make these brave soldiers tremble; they are more afraid of the capers of a monkey that comes to hide among the ranks than the entire enemy army. These superstitious ideas often have unfortunate results. They believe, for example, that if a craft crosses the river at the same time as the *ballon* (which means small boat)²⁴⁴

²⁴² The first stage of the war between Bangkok and Vientiane took place in 1827. Here, Bruguière is referring to the second stage, in 1828, when Thai forces were sent to the city the second time.

²⁴³ CR. 'The only uniform we have ever seen worn by the Siamese soldiers is a red band about the head, having as their only dress a waist cloth in common with the rest of the people.' [Dean's observations are misleading and apparently refer only to the daily routine of ordinary soldiers, when they wore only personal clothing. For important occasions such as public processions in Bangkok, formal uniforms and weapons were issued by the government storehouses and armouries. Eds]

²⁴⁴ A *ballon* is more correctly a barge of state.

transporting the commander-in-chief is going to pass, the army is threatened with a great disaster of some kind. To thwart this dire augury, they kill all the people in the craft. To avoid such untoward accidents, the army is always [202] preceded by town criers sent by the monarch, warning all the craft on the river to line up along the banks at the approach of the army; but it is rare, in spite of these precautions, that some misfortune does not occur.

When the army leaves the river, the ammunition is loaded on elephants. The different battalions march under their flags, but in little order. The flags are red, with designs of different colours. The navy's flag has for armorial bearings an elephant; by means of these flags the commander-in-chief transmits his orders; the different ways they are waved inform the army if it should advance or prepare to retreat. It is said the Siamese fight in platoons. They conceal themselves behind trees and undergrowth to fire at the enemy with greater advantage. If they are very numerous, they form a crescent in order to surround the enemy's army. When the elephants are well-trained, they cause greater carnage than many soldiers together. They fight with their tusks, their trunks, their feet and the enormous mass of their bodies. It is very difficult to wound them mortally with firearms.²⁴⁵

[JUSTICE]

The Siamese have some laws which are quite good, but others which are far from being perfect. The deficiency would be tolerable if the laws were observed. Justice is very badly administered. When the different parties come before the judge to plead their cause, he puts both contenders in prison so that the accuser pays the expenses, if the accused, though guilty, has not the money to pay the costs. The judge has the ability to let the case drag on, in order to extract money from both sides. [203] There is no means of complaining to the king; the magistrate is always right, he knows how to muddle the case so that he is nearly always absolved, and the unfortunate accuser is punished for having told the truth and sought justice for a legitimate complaint.

Money in this country is an infallible means of avoiding the laws and getting out of difficulties. Even a criminal can have the punishment given to him reduced and rendered virtually void; he has only to promise money to the executioner. Custom, which has the force of law in the kingdom, allows creditors to demand 30 percent; but it is very rare they are content with such huge interest; if the person who has borrowed is poor and has a pressing need of money, the lender demands 60 or even 120 percent; if, at the end of the contract, the debtor cannot repay his debt, the creditor has the right to take him to be his slave; or in default of that, to

²⁴⁵ Again, none of this information is likely to have been gathered by the missionary at first hand.

take his wife and his children. I have to say, in praise of the present king, that he lends money to his subjects without requiring any usury, but the great lords are not so delicate.

If a master hits his slave with an instrument used for stirring rice, or with the chopsticks the Chinese use instead of a fork, the slave is free, and the master loses his money; but if he rains blows on him, the slave cannot complain. This I find a most curious viewpoint.

The law permits parents who have sold their daughter to her husband for her to be kept as a domestic for as long as the tree, planted in front of their hut the day they marry, remains alive. The newly-weds take care to select an areca palm, which dies easily. Custom limits the period to [204] three years. Thus, thanks to this extraordinary contract, the wife becomes the slave of the husband and servant of the relatives. This abuse does not exist among Christians.²⁴⁶

The right of asylum exists in Siam. Our churches and the enclosures around them also enjoy the right of sanctuary. The king has not touched this privilege, under any pretext. A criminal who takes refuge in a pagoda cannot be forcibly removed. The king can only ask the talapoins to hand him over. If he takes the robes of a talapoin, it is unusual if he does not obtain his pardon. That alone is enough to give you an idea of the sanctity of these bonzes. Since I have been here I have often heard about some offence by these supposed Siamese gods.²⁴⁷ Only a fortnight ago one of these holy personages assassinated a man who was chastising him for his unbecoming behaviour. He was not punished with death, although convicted. At the present time there are legally 60 accused of different crimes.

The penal code is not severe. The king is very reluctant to sign a death sentence. He is always afraid of committing a sin. Torture, though, is practiced. There are also some frightful punishments unknown to Europeans, which are reserved for the worst criminals; but I doubt if they have been carried out once in a century. An ordinary individual condemned to death has his head cut off. Great nobles are cudgelled, sewn into a sack,²⁴⁸ and thrown into the river. This seems to me to be a sad privilege. After capital punishment, the worst and most dishonourable penalty is to be condemned to feed the elephants. The unfortunates receiving this punishment have to go every day to collect a certain quantity of grass. When in spite of their application and their [205] exhaustion, they cannot complete their task, they are roundly beaten. They cannot have themselves replaced, nor obtain

²⁴⁶ CR. 'The Catholics give a wife to such of the Chinese as will profess the Catholic faith. By this inducement many are added to their number.' [Almost all Chinese immigrants were male, and therefore any prospect of marrying a local woman was an inducement. Eds.]

²⁴⁷ Again, the author's misconception (or deliberate misinterpretation) of the meaning of the word *phra* leads him into gross error.

²⁴⁸ The order is wrong: they are placed in a sack and then cudgelled. This was so that no royal blood would fall on the ground.

help, nor buy grass with their own money. They are marked on their foreheads; their punishment is for life. In general they mark the faces of all the criminals who are to be mistrusted. The slaves brought from afar²⁴⁹ and which should not be ransomed bear marked on their arm the name of their master. All the Chinese who enter Siam ought to wear on their arm a special bangle to prove they have paid the king a head tax.²⁵⁰ A criminal condemned to death has to go round the city walls three times, and to warn passers-by that he, so-and-so, convicted of such-and-such crime, has been condemned to capital punishment.²⁵¹

I must finally stop. I think I have filled my commission; perhaps I have gone beyond what you expected. On a separate sheet you will find a notice about the language of the country; it will give you an idea of oriental languages, as they have many affinities to each other.

I recommend to your fervent prayers and your blessed thanksgiving the infidels, the Christians and the missionaries in the apostolic vicariate of Siam; but I recommend to you above all he who has the honour to be

Your most humble servant
and your most faithful friend
BRUGUIÈRE, miss. apost.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ And so most probably captives of war.

²⁵⁰ CR. 'The Chinese instead of labouring upon the public works pay triennially a poll tax of \$3, and for a few weeks, during the time of collecting this tax, each man as he pays his money takes a receipt and had a cord tied around his wrist, and sealed by the government officers to secure him against paying the tax again the same year. Sometimes this seal is broken off by accident, or on purpose by evil-designing persons, who then take the unfortunate man before a magistrate by whom he is compelled to repay his tax and take a new certificate.'

²⁵¹ CR. 'In the bishop's account of Siam we are pleasingly reminded of many things of which we have been an eye-witness, as well as informed of some things which were altogether new to us. On the whole, these pages, though at times giving a wrong impression to the reader, are calculated to convey much information of a country and people little known, but who [sic] contain much to interest the commercial and religious world. The commerce is becoming a monopoly with the officers of government. The port charges, amounting to about one thousand dollars on an ordinary vessel of four hundred tons, present a serious obstacle to the trade of European and American shipping, while the Siamese without this expense can take their produce with their own vessels to the free ports of Singapore and Hong Kong. It is believed that a visit to Bangkok by an English or American man-of-war might very easily place the commerce of that country on a better footing, better for foreigners, better for the Siamese government, and surely better for the native inhabitants. It is to be hoped that among the representatives of foreign powers now in China there may be those who will interest themselves in removing the existing evil in Siam, while by so doing the interests of their own country may be promoted.' At the end of *The Chinese Repository* version of Bruguière's letter here are added 'a few paragraphs concerning the use of tobacco, opium, guncha [cannabis] or bang, and spirits among the people, extracted from a missionary circular recently received from Bangkok.' As this is not of the pen of either Bruguière or Dean, it is omitted here.

²⁵² Apostolic Missionary, in abbreviated Latin (*missionarius apostolicus*, a missionary with faculties from the Holy See).

[206]

Notice on the Siamese language

In the apostolic vicariate of Siam more than 20 different languages are spoken. Most are as close as French and Arabic, but the knowledge of all these languages is not absolutely necessary. The most common are Portuguese, English, Malay and Siamese.

I do not know English. Portuguese as spoken in the Indies is very easy, [learning it] is a matter of a few days. Malay is a language which seems to me quite regular. It is gentle and harmonious and is pleasant on the ear. French people learn it quickly; three months is sufficient to speak Malay tolerably. The people who speak this language are Muslim, followers of the sect of Ali,²⁵³ if I am not mistaken. The Malays are scattered throughout the Malacca peninsula, in all the islands of Sunda, the Philippines, Andaman, Borneo, etc. The Malays are a people apart, and differ a lot from their neighbours in their physique, customs, and character. It does not seem that they were the original inhabitants of the lands they occupy today. The Siamese call them Quix [*khaek* ไท];²⁵⁴ this word means *foreigner*, *advena*.

Siamese is not as easy to learn as Malay.²⁵⁵ It is more difficult for several reasons, namely the lack of grammar, a dictionary²⁵⁶ and other basic texts, pronunciation, the construction of phrases, idioms, etc. These people have no concept of grammar, have almost no fixed rules, and one cannot learn the few they have before knowing the language perfectly. Siamese is a poor language, with very few words; when [207] one wants to speak about the arts, sciences, and especially religion, one cannot find the terms, and has to find circumlocutions which rarely give the idea one wishes to express; but there are many expressions to indicate the most common objects.

This language is monosyllabic and difficult. It has many aspirations, it is melodious (here people do not speak, they sing); the sounds of this language are not by themselves clear, distinct or well-articulated, and are even more so in the mouth of a Siamese, always filled with betel, areca nut, lime, and tobacco.

Siamese properly speaking has no declensions, no genders, and no numbers; there are very few words which are by their nature substantives or adjectives.

²⁵³ Shias.

²⁵⁴ How one is expected to pronounce this word is unclear. The Siamese today often refer to the Malays as *khaek*, which is also a generic term for Muslims, South Asians and visitors (or immigrants) in general.

²⁵⁵ If Bruguière's somewhat confusing discussion that follows reflects his grasp of the Thai language at this juncture, one can readily appreciate why his efforts at evangelisation produced so few results. The Thai probably assured him with typical politeness that they understood him, and then went away wondering what he was trying to say.

²⁵⁶ These wants were soon to be filled by Monsignor Pallegoix, who published a Thai grammar at the Assumption College in Bangkok in 1850 and a Thai-Latin-French-English dictionary in Paris in 1854.

To express gender, they add after the common word these expressions ‘which is male... which is female.’ For example, *mae* [sic, *ma* ม้า] in Siamese means ‘horse’ in general. If I want to say ‘I have a horse’ I have to express the phrase thus ‘Me have horse, male being, being one’; two, three ‘two being’, ‘three being’. If I want to say I have a mare, I have to say ‘Me have horse, female being or substance, being one.’ To indicate the indefinite plural, for example, ‘I have horses’, one says in Siamese ‘I have horse, several beings.’ Their verbs are active and passive at the same time. They express the present, the past and the future with the aid of two particles which they put before the verb; they have yet other particles to indicate other parts of the discourse, for the same word is anything one wants it to be. Thus *rac* means to love. I love, *dai rac* I have loved, *cha-rac* I shall love, *kwam-rac* love, *thi-rac* or *na-rac* loveable, *duai-rac* amiable, *rac* loving, *tong-rac* [208] being loved, *dai-tong-rac* having been loved. In this language, verbs have only three tenses, so it is not only difficult, but even impossible to express all the nuances found in verbs in Latin, French, etc. If the rule of which I have just given you an example were fixed and invariable, we could comprehend, but it is not so, and for another word one has to adopt a different formula. One can regard this rule as general.²⁵⁷

The Siamese language has no inceptive, argumentative and frequentative verbs. There exist, though, composite verbs. For example, *au* means ‘take’, *ma* means ‘come’; if you join *au* to *ma* (*au-ma*) you form a verb meaning ‘bring’. If you join *au* to *pai*, which means ‘go’, ‘leave’, you have a verb meaning ‘to take away’. In composite verbs, the direct object is placed in the middle and the indirect object at the end of the verbs. So, if I say to a Siamese domestic, ‘Bring me this book’ or ‘Bring this book to me’ he would not understand, he would certainly reply ‘Father say what? I no understand.’ I could have used Siamese expressions, but if I revise the phrase thus: ‘You take book volume, that come to me’ he would clearly understand what I was saying to him; but I am not sure if you yourself would have understood.

The lack of declensions and conjugations makes the Siamese follow the natural order of ideas in the construction of phrase. They always place the subject at the beginning, then the verb and its complement. When the proposition has complex meaning, they immediately join to the word which expresses the main idea all the other words which serve to limit it or simply to develop its meaning. This [209] language does not have long phrases; a sentence which is slightly extended leads to such confusion in the discourse that it is impossible to understand anything. One must always proceed step by step, and take with one many particles which never change, which results in a monotonous and tedious construction. Here is a phrase in the Siamese fashion, taken randomly from the New Testament “Prince three

²⁵⁷ Bruguière is trying to apply Latin grammatical rules to a language that is quite different, and the attempt is in vain. Something of what he says about tenses is correct, much is not.

persons questioning, have asked saying Lord very great king, ruler, lord of Judea which a short while ago be born; this being so, Lord in what place in what part be born; for we have see the star of Lord in the regions to the east side; we therefore come bend down, offer our homage to Lord. When the King Herod have hear that, so the King Herod then have been troubled etc.” In English:²⁵⁸ “The three magi said ‘In what place is born the king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east, and we have come to adore him. At these words Herod was troubled.’”

It is elegant in Siamese to repeat continually the rank of the person being addressed, and the word which expresses sentiments of respect on the part of the speaker. It is also a mark of elegance to begin all the phases of a story with this formula: ‘after that too’, or ‘also say’. Thus the three words of Caesar ‘*Veni, vide, vici*’ would appear trivial expressions to a scholarly Siamese. He would say ‘We be come, after that we have seen, after that we have conquered.’ Precision is not one of the qualities of this language.

It is quite another matter when they are dealing with a lofty subject. They then assume an emphatic tone, they pile up one above the other synonyms which they [210] lard with terms taken from Pali, which have all the more merit because those listening understand them but little. I have before me a sample of this genre taken from a Siamese manuscript. The author wanted to produce something sublime. Here it is: ‘Although in truth that be place place which be full always, always, always, with darkness, darkness of death, cover, cover these too, be overcome be arrived tumult, tumult, tumult, tumult, tumult, spreading all hell, when, when, when God very great Jesus have feel pain, misery, suffering until death greater when, when Lucifer make overturn him, fall from high, come from heaven.’ Can you believe that the author wanted to translate literally the phrase, taken from a book printed in Europe, ‘Although hell is always a place of affliction, nevertheless the tumult which occurred when Jesus Christ died was greater than when Lucifer was chased out of heaven.’ Some French travellers who only admire, like their compatriots, what they do not have at home, would find that admirable; so be it, but in spite of their testimony and my goodwill, my poor taste only allows me to see in it so much gibberish.

The greatest difficulty lies in the pronunciation. A word written in the same way has often many different meanings, which are sometimes opposites, depending on whether the tone is raised or not. Here is a sample: ‘be near’ *ju-klai* [อยู่ใกล้], ‘be far’ *ju-klai* [อยู่ไกล]; ‘who is selling eggs in the fortress? No one, the seller is sick,’ *khai khai, khai kai nai khai? Ha mi khai pha-khai khai* [ใครขายไข่ไก่ในค่าย หามีใครไม่พ่อค้าไข่]. I could give many more examples, but shall limit myself to cite one more, and I shall stop. ‘It is [211] said that near the old city of Ayutthaya nine mountains

²⁵⁸ Actually in French in the text.

can be seen which are in the shape of an ox; inside the city is sold a kind of white rice which causes severe itching in the knee, and makes one scratch.’ A Siamese would say: *Kau bok elai meuang kao-ko mi phu-khao kau an pen rup-khau ko-khau khrung mi khau khau thi tham hai khau kau hua khau* [เขาบอกอะไร เมืองเก่าก็มีภูเขาเก่าอันเป็นรูปเขาโค เขากรุงมีข้าวขาว ที่ทำให้เขาคันหัวเขา]. I defy all the French who do not know the language to pronounce the different *khau* in a way a Siamese could understand.²⁵⁹ But a native, by going up and down the scale with its sharps and flats, its aspirations, lengthening and shortening the sounds, would succeed in making himself perfectly understood by his compatriots, because they have such slight difference in some of their tones that a European has the greatest difficulty in the world in appreciating them.

There are six tones in this language very short (:), short (u), long (–), high (’), low (‘) and medium.²⁶⁰ To indicate that the *o* is closed, the Siamese put a circumflex above it (*ô*).²⁶¹ The very short tone equals a quarter or a third of a plainchant note, the short tone a half-note, the long nearly two notes. When the middle tone is on G (*sol*), the highest tone goes to B (*si*), and the lowest goes down to D (*ré*). But these tones are not completely whole; they slide over the intermediate notes to go from G to B or to go down to D. The symbols I have just spoken about are used only by the Christians who use the Roman alphabet; the Siamese have the value of the tones and the different sounds are mixed and as it were fused with their characters.²⁶² Even though the language is difficult, one soon learns it. The necessity of speaking is [212] the reason one makes more progress in a few months in this country than one would in ten years in France. After six months of serious study a young missionary can easily explain all the books, he can preach, confess, etc; he will undoubtedly not speak perfectly, he will pronounce poorly, but he can be followed and understood, which is enough.

The Siamese write like us from left to right. Then use a wooden stylus; their books are a kind of cardboard folded zigzag rather like the way cloth merchants fold their lengths of material. They write with ink or chalk, depending on whether the cardboard is black or white. I spoke to you about the Pali language; it is chiefly from Pali that the Siamese obtain their forms of address when they speak to princes etc, for they have many languages; there is one for the people, one for the king, etc. Misfortune for he who uses a vulgar expression, no matter how respectful it may

²⁵⁹ Of course, the meaning changes depending on which of the five tones of central Thai is employed, and whether the vowel sound is long or short. The written forms in Thai are easily distinguished, one from another, whereas Bruguière’s simplified romanisation is not.

²⁶⁰ No symbol is given for this. Most agree that there are five tones in central Thai, and the author here confuses tones with vowel length.

²⁶¹ As noted below, the Siamese do not use a circumflex. Here, he may be referring to the *ò* sound in words such as *kò* ฟ้า.

²⁶² That is, the Thai system of writing determines the tone of a vowel.

be elsewhere, when speaking to a person of rank; he will not be pardoned readily for this mistake.

The Siamese have an alphabet which has much in common with ours, and which has 54 letters. They calculate having 38 consonants and 16 vowels. They do not have the sound *ze, xe, ja, jo, ga* as we have in French. They have four consonants we do not have in our language. The Christians express this sound with the letters *xe* [?], but pronounce it like the Portuguese. The second is represented by the two characters *ch* []; you pronounce this consonant as a Frenchman would pronounce *tch*, in one breath. The third is represented by the consonant *je* []; the Siamese pronounce this like the Spanish and the Portuguese [213] pronounce it as in Jerusalem and Jeremiah. They represent the fourth by the two consonants *ng* []; the sound designated by this consonant has much in common with the lowing of a bull. Europeans have trouble in pronouncing it correctly. When the Christian Siamese want to aspirate the K, P, and T (they have no other aspirated consonants), they put an *h* immediately after. Note that *ph* does not give the sound *fe*, because it is an aspirate. Their *r* is always a gentle sound. They never pronounce it like us in the words *errors, irritate*; the Siamese write their vowels in European letters:

a e ee ì o ô ó ù au a

Here is what they correspond to: a é ai i o au eu u aou ou

Consonants in Siamese letters and letters they correspond to:²⁶³

ก	ข	ช	ค	ค	ฆ	ง	จ
Kō	khò	khó	khò	khō	khō:	ngō	chō
ฉ	ช	ซ	ณ	ญ	ด	ต	ถ
xó	xò	sō	xo:	jō	dō	tō	thó
ท	ฐ	น	บ	ป	พ	ฝ	ฟ
thò	tho:	nō	bō	pō	phó	fó	phò
พ	ภ	ม	ย	ร	ล	ว	ส
fō	pho:	mō	jō	rō	lō	vō	só
ห	ฬ	ฤ	ฦ	ฦ	ฦ		
hò	l'ō	rū'c	rū'	lū'c[e?]	lū'		

²⁶³Bruguière deviates slightly from the modern standard order of consonants. For *xo*: he gives ณ, which is incorrect; the very similar correct character ฆ (which is not in the table) should be in this place. Between *jō* ญ and *bō* บ, the consonants are not in the standard order, and six are omitted (ฎ, ฏ, ฐ, ท, ฒ and ฒ). Four others (ศ, ษ, ฐ and ฎ) are omitted near the end of the list. The table of vowels omits the letter for *a* that is sounded only between two consonants (as in วัณ). It also does not show the combinations of vowels that produce diphthongs and some short-vowel forms such as ๔๕.

[214] Vowels in Siamese letters and what they correspond to in our language



Here is the Lord's Prayer in Siamese in European letters, with an interlinear translation; I shall try to render word for word the meaning corresponding to the Siamese terms.

	<i>Prôt</i>	<i>Phra:</i>	<i>phuthi</i>	<i>Bida</i>	<i>heeng</i>	<i>khà - phà</i>
	O	Dieu	auguste	père	des	serviteurs de
	<i>chaù</i>	<i>Thâng</i>	<i>la'i,</i>	<i>thân jû</i>	<i>savân</i>	<i>hai namaxù</i>
	Monseigneur	tous,	Seigneur	être au ciel,	que nom	
	<i>Phra:</i>	<i>phuthi</i>	<i>Bida,</i>	<i>xalo'ng rùng ru'ang</i>	<i>pâi mu'ang</i>	
	Dieu	auguste	Père	sanctifié glorifié,	aller royaume	
	<i>Phra,</i>	<i>phuthi</i>	<i>Bida</i>	<i>khrop khrong nan</i>	<i>khò hai</i>	
	Dieu,	auguste	père	gouverneur	cela	demander que
	<i>ma</i>	<i>thung,</i>	<i>khó hai</i>	<i>leeu nu'ng</i>	<i>nam phra</i>	
	venir	jusques	demander	que se	fasse	volonté
	<i>hú'rù'thai,</i>	<i>nâ:</i>	<i>phen</i>	<i>din samo' nâ:</i>	<i>savân a-</i>	
	de Dieu	sur	surface	terre	comme	dans ciel, nour-
	<i>hán</i>	<i>liang khà</i>	<i>phà</i>	<i>chaù</i>	<i>thuk vân</i>	
	riture	nourrir	serviteur	de	Monseigneur	tous jours,
	<i>khò</i>	<i>phra:tan nâ:</i>	<i>cala</i>	<i>vân</i>	<i>ni, khò</i>	
	demander	accorder	dans	temps	jour	celui-ci
	<i>phra:</i>	<i>mahá</i>	<i>caruna</i>	<i>prôt</i>	<i>jôc nì</i>	
	Dieu	très-grand	miséricordieux	daigner	remettre	dettes
[215]	<i>khâ</i>	<i>phà</i>	<i>chaù,</i>	<i>mu'án</i>	<i>khâ</i>	<i>phà</i>
	serviteur	de	Monseigneur	comme	serviteur	de
	<i>chaù</i>	<i>prôt</i>	<i>kee</i>	<i>khâú</i>	<i>khò</i>	<i>melta pra-</i>
	Monseigneur	remettre	à	eux	demander	miséricor-
	<i>ni</i>	<i>Phra:</i>	<i>phuthi</i>	<i>Bida</i>	<i>chaù</i>	<i>khà, ja</i>
	dieux	Dieu	auguste	père	Seigneur	de
	<i>la:</i>	<i>vang</i>	<i>khà</i>	<i>phà</i>	<i>chaù,</i>	<i>nâi</i>
	point	abandonner	serviteur	de	Monseigneur	dans

pa chôn lò luang thôt-long prakan dâi, tee và vâi
 tentation trompeuse tenter quiconque, mais que
khà phà chàu thâng lai, phôn chac phû
 serviteur de Monseigneur tous délivrer de ce qui
oînnarai. Amen.
 mal. Ainsi soit-il.²⁶⁴

[BRUGUIÈRE'S ROMANISED LORD'S PRAYER IN THAI SCRIPT ADDED BY EDITORS]

โปรดพระพุทธรูปบิดาแห่งข้าพระเจ้าทั้งหลาย ท่านอยู่สวรรค์ให้นามชื่อพระพุทธรูปบิดา ฉลองรุ่งเรืองไปเมืองพระพุทธรูปบิดาครอบครองนั้น ขอให้มาถึง ขอให้แล้วหนึ่ง[?] น้ำพระฤทัย ฅแผ่นดินเสมอณสวรรค์ อาหารเลี้ยงข้าพระเจ้าทุกวัน ขอประทานณเวลานี้ ขอพระมหากษัตริย์โปรดยกหนีข้าพระเจ้า เหมือนข้าพระเจ้าโปรดแก่เขา ขอเมตตาปราณีพระพุทธรูปบิดาเจ้าข้า อย่าละหวังข้าพระเจ้าในประจัญ ล่องลงทอดลงประการใด แต่ว่าไว้ข้าพระเจ้าทั้งหลาย พันจากผู้อื่นตรา[?]. อาแมน.

[215] This is the prayer which all the [Christian] children at the age of six to seven learn, and then understand it, at least when they have reached the age of 10 or 12.

The Burmese write like the Siamese, but almost all their letters have the shape of an *o*. The Malays use Arabic characters and they write from right to left like the Jews. Their books start where ours end. The Tonkinese and Cochinchinese use Chinese characters and write in the same way too, that is from top to bottom.

We have in the Indies this big dictionary which appeared in France some years back, and which can be found in nearly all libraries.²⁶⁵ A Chinese scholar told me it was good, but it can be of no use to our missionaries who desire to go to China, because all the words in it are Mandarin terms, which the people do not use.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Bruguière has translated word-for-word from the Thai into French, rather than translating the meaning of each phrase. To French readers, the resulting sentence structure must have seemed bizarre, with a word sequence that is barely comprehensible and only because the reader already knows this prayer. The diacritics of the vowels in this passage are not the same as the ones outlined in his table of Thai vowels.

²⁶⁵ Bruguière is probably referring to the 1813 Glemona dictionary and the 1819 Klapproth supplement.

²⁶⁶ Not quite. The peoples of southern China, which Bruguière is most likely to have come into contact with at this date, spoke Hainanese, Hokkien, Cantonese, Fujianese, Teo Chiu and so on, which are certainly very different from what used to be called Mandarin, spoken in the north. By 'our missionaries' he is surely referring to the French society, which at this time had a mission in Sichuan Province but none in Mandarin-speaking areas.

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