

MEMOIRS OF PIERRE POIVRE: THE THAI PORT OF MERGUI IN 1745

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Adventures of Pierre Poivre (1719–86)

When historians mention Pierre Poivre, they draw attention to his contributions to horticulture. He made numerous attempts in the 1750s to acquire plants from the eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago and cultivate them at Port Louis on the island of Mauritius—a French colony in the western part of the Indian Ocean known in his time as the Île de France. He made two voyages from Port Louis to the archipelago and succeeded at the second attempt in bringing back seeds and seedlings of clove and nutmeg trees, which the Dutch East India Company had long jealously guarded, to maintain a monopoly in the spice trade to Europe. Poivre's hope was to demonstrate that the plants could be grown outside the islands of their origin and to introduce them into various French possessions for commercial cultivation, as a means of developing the colonial island economies.

His early efforts did not succeed. All the plants brought to Port Louis in 1754 died, and Poivre was thwarted by formidable opponents. He had a long-running feud with a local expert, who was responsible for the botanical gardens, and the governor who arrived in 1755 was opposed to these schemes. Poivre thus returned to France in 1757 and took up the life of a gentleman farmer on his estate outside Lyon, where he occupied himself with the study of botany and especially plants that had potential for commercial development.

A decade later, he was called upon to serve as the Intendant of the French colony. He returned to Port Louis with the powers and resources necessary to revive his project. In 1770 two ships were sent to the archipelago and returned from Maluku with the specimens that he needed for experimental planting and research. In 1776 the first cloves were picked, and two years later the first nutmegs were harvested from a tree that Poivre had planted. Poivre himself did not stay long enough to witness this triumph and had already returned to France. Mauritius never became an important producer and exporter, but Poivre's groundwork made it possible to disperse these and other valuable commercial plants much later to other French colonies in the Indian Ocean and tropical America.

More is known about Poivre's life during his two long periods in Mauritius, because records of his work have been preserved in archives on the island and in France. Much less is known of his adventures prior to his first brief visit to the French colony in early 1747, because of a tragedy that befell him at the age of twenty-six, when he lost his personal records of the preceding years. In later life he

outlined these and other important events of his career, which a friend published in a biography of him soon after his death in 1786 at his estate outside Lyon.

He was born in 1719 into a merchant family long established in the trade of raw silk in Lyon, and it appeared that he was destined for the priesthood. He completed his theological studies with the Missionaries of Saint Joseph in Lyon at the age of sixteen. He applied himself subsequently to the study of botany, natural history and agriculture, which he claimed (at least in later life) were useful subjects for missionaries to know. His scientific knowledge, particularly of botany, is evident in the earliest of his own writings that have survived. He associated himself with the French missionary society, the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP), before he had reached the age at which he could be ordained as a priest, and he was sent in 1740 to Macau and Guangzhou (Canton) in the company of the MEP procurer, with the expectation that he would serve in the missions and be ordained by one of the French bishops in Asia.

As part of his work, he had an opportunity to accompany some French missionaries who were bound for CochinChina, the Nguyen-ruled southern Viet kingdom. The exact dates are not known, but he seems to have been there during 1742 and 1743, and then he returned to China. By this juncture, he had decided not to take holy orders and intended to go home to France.

In mid-January 1745 Poivre sailed from Guangzhou on the *Dauphin*, one of three ships belonging to the French trading company, which were bound for France. The time was ill-chosen, because Britain and France had entered the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) on opposite sides and had been at war for the whole time that Poivre was in Asia. Ships of either country were vulnerable to attack by warships of the other, and three French trading ships laden with valuable goods from China would be a rich prize for any British commander. In early February, as the French ships passed through a strait close to the island of Banka, they were caught by surprise and came under attack from two British warships. In the fighting, Poivre's right hand was struck by a cannon ball, and the next day the British surgeon had to amputate part of the arm to prevent the spread of gangrene. The captured ships were taken to Batavia, where they arrived about ten days later. Although most of the crew were held in a camp guarded by the British, Poivre was set free. He was destitute, and from February to June 1745 he lived at an inn run by a German, who provided him with lodging and food at no cost, since he had no means to pay.

During the last week of June 1745, about sixty of the Frenchmen were allowed to sail on a French Company ship, the *Favori*, which had been captured by the English and was in poor condition. They headed for the French colony of Pondichéry, on the east coast of India, but they started in the wrong season for sailing west from the Indonesian archipelago. They failed to make the crossing and

were forced by the winds to turn in the opposite direction. They went north-east to Mergui, the most important port of the Thai kingdom on the west coast of the Malay peninsula, where they waited four months for the seasonal monsoon winds to change.

When the *Dauphin* was captured, Poivre had lost almost everything, including the journal of his travels since leaving France in 1740. In the course of his attempts to return home, he was captured a second time by the British and did not reach France until June 1748. Fortunately, he recorded his adventures from the time that he sailed from China and during his long stay in India. A copy of these incomplete memoirs is preserved in the city library of Lyon and was published in 1968 by Louis Malleret.¹

One section of these memoirs describes his stay from August to December 1745 in Mergui. This part of the coastline came under Burmese control in the 1760s and was never recovered by the Thai. It is often neglected by historians of Thailand, even though the port of Mergui and the nearby administrative centre of Tenasserim were the main gateway to the west for Thai trade during the Ayutthaya period, from the mid-1400s when the Thai gained control of the area and began to develop the port. Poivre's description provides a rare, eye-witness account from the viewpoint of a very scholarly traveller, at a time when Thai administration of Mergui was nearing its end. The translation that follows is his account of this 1745 visit. We begin on board the *Favori*, after the sighting of two islands that were landmarks of the channel leading to the port.

Translation of Poivre's description of Mergui

As we were approaching these two islands [on 18 August 1745], we discovered at the headland of Tenasserim a ship that had raised anchor and set her sails, as soon as she had seen us, and was coming out towards us. Since we were going towards her, it was not long before we fell in with each other. After taking close notice of us, they fired two salvos, one cannon-ball windward and one leeward. We had nought with which to respond, and thus we made up our minds at

¹ Details for this brief biographical introduction to Pierre Poivre have been taken selectively from some of his own writings and his modern biographers. He published very little in his lifetime and was known primarily for his *Voyages d'un philosophe* (1768), published in an English edition with the title *Travels of a Philosopher* (1769). Some of his personal manuscripts and papers in various archives have been published in modern editions (Poivre 1918 and 2006, Ly-Tiao-Fane 1958 and Malleret 1968). Ly-Tio-Fane opens her account with a summary of the biography published in 1786, soon after Poivre's death, by his friend Samuel Dupont de Nemours. She then proceeds to demolish the idealised story (much of which came from Poivre himself) and to provide a truer and more scholarly interpretation of events. A transcription of Poivre's manuscript recounting his travels during 1745 and 1746 was first published by Malleret (1968). The original French text of the section translated in the present article can be found on pages 48–77 of that edition.

first to bring out our Dutch flag. There was general dismay among us, because we believed they had a pirate flag, although they had only their own flag with them, which was not a pirate's. For their part, they actually raised the flag of the empire,² which was so dirty that it was impossible to recognise it.

This wretched ship was originally a French ship sent from Pondichéry to Mergui to take on a cargo of timber, for the use of the [French] Company in India. Under the command of Mr Baudrand, she had been commissioned by Muslims, whose flag she flew in order to avoid all the disadvantages of our war with England. The entire crew were [lascars] under the command of a captain and two officers—all three of them French. This ship had gone to the entrance to the port of Mergui, and the captain had sent his second in command to look for a pilot, in order to enter the river. At that juncture, the ship was boarded by twenty-four deserter-villains of English nationality. Their unfortunate fate had led them to Mergui, and they had seized two large local barges. They had then boarded and seized this ship, after assassinating the captain.

What brave men we had encountered! As they were without food supplies, they took from us what little we had left. If we had been poorer, we would never have extricated ourselves from the hands of these wretches. But seeing that we had nothing more, they let us go, after giving us a real fright for some twelve hours.

Arrival at Mergui and description of this port of the kingdom of Siam

On 20 August, after leaving the pirates, we were searching for the entrance to Mergui. We went into the channel between Iron Island and King's Island. This corridor is so narrow that its width is less than the range of a pistol shot. Although no one among us was familiar with this passage, we risked it and succeeded. In doing so, we had more good luck than prudence. The true passage is to the north of the island....³

On 22 August, the officer, who had been sent to Mergui in a Siamese barge, came back with food supplies and the pilot.⁴ This same day we anchored in the port

² Poivre is referring to the flag of the Holy Roman Empire, flown by the ships of the Ostend Company, which he mentions later in his text.

³ Having lost his writing hand, Poivre dictated these memoirs to successive secretaries. His dictation often wandered into philosophical thoughts, reflections about religion and other subjects not directly relevant to Mergui. At the recommendation of anonymous reviewers of my draft translation, I have omitted such passages in this published version. The omissions are indicated by three dots in the translation. It should be noted, however, that these omissions change the tone of the composition greatly, from one with frequent expressions of praise for the virtues of Christianity to one of straightforward, personal observation.

⁴ Poivre must be referring to a local pilot in Mergui, who guided large ships safely into the port, through the channels between the islands, reefs and shallow waters.

of Mergui. A big river waters the Province of Tenasserim and casts itself into the sea at Mergui through two river mouths, which form the island of Maderamalan in the middle of the port.⁵

The same evening, I landed and found lodging with the French missionary Mr Cavau,⁶ who resides at Mergui. I received every courtesy from this gentleman during the four months [August-December 1745] that I spent in that country. I had all the time to become acquainted with it, having nothing to do other than improving my mind. The best thing in particular about Mergui is its port, which is safe and spacious. The air is healthy there, and all our sick men recovered.

The land is good and would produce a lot, if the less lazy individuals among the inhabitants would make an effort to cultivate it. But the land still lies fallow. There is nothing anywhere but forest. I do not know whether the land has ever been cultivated since the [Biblical] Flood. No one either clears or cultivates it, except in proportion to and to the extent of what is needed. No one foresees in one year the mishaps that may occur in another. ...Still, the year I was there, the country was threatened with famine, and rice had begun to be quite scarce. This part of the kingdom of Siam produces all sorts of fruits of the Indies.... And just look at the diverse fruits and a lot of other plants that I have described in my compilation. There are very fine forests, and a lot of them; hunters find all sorts of game there in abundance. I shall leave the details of all the useful, agreeable and interesting things that nature has to offer in this land, for writing up later in my journal.⁷

The country is not much populated. It is inhabited by Burmese (the ancient masters of the land, from whom the Siamese usurped it), Muslims, Portuguese mestizos, Siamese and some Chinese (whose junks come to Siam and who, from there [ie, the capital at Ayutthaya], spread throughout the kingdom). Of all the

⁵ The Thai Province of Tenasserim extended along the coast of the Andaman Sea, south of Tavoy. The area was very thinly populated and had no large seaport except Mergui, near the entrance to the estuary of the Tenasserim River. The fortified town of Tenasserim and residence of the governor were a short distance up-river and not accessible to ocean-going vessels with deep draughts.

⁶ Cavau is a spelling error by the secretary to whom Poivre dictated these memoirs. Pierre-Daniel de Cabannes de Cauna was a priest of the French missionary society (Missions Étrangères de Paris, MEP), who left France in 1738 for India. He began work at Mergui possibly as early as 1739, and went to Ayutthaya in early 1746, shortly after Poivre's departure from Mergui. He was certainly one of Poivre's most important sources of information about Mergui and the Province of Tenasserim on the coast of the Andaman Sea. Cauna's knowledge of affairs in Ayutthaya in 1745, however, must have been acquired at second hand through regular communications with the French seminary and bishop in the Thai capital.

⁷ Poivre's references to his compilation (*recueil*) and to his journal show that he kept records of observations about natural history, in which he described the flora and fauna he observed during his voyage. He never published this work. The only botanical observations found by Malleret, when he attempted to restore the text relating to Mergui, are the descriptions of three trees and the betel-vine, appended to the memoir concerning Mergui.

diverse nationalities who inhabit Mergui, the Burmese are the best. They are calm, faithful and less lazy than the others. They are kindly and receive strangers rather well. These poor wretches are extremely harassed by the Siamese officials, who steal from them with impunity....

Christians are very few in number. There are reckoned to be no more than 400 of them, both men and women. Heretofore they were extremely maltreated by the officers of the king of Siam [Baromma Kot, r. 1733–58]. That is what got the French bishop [Jean de Lolière-Puycomtat, bishop 1738–55], who resides in the capital, involved in asking the king for the Christians of Mergui to be dependent only on the missionary who resides here. The king granted the request in such a way that the missionary of Mergui is appointed by the court of Siam as the governor of all the ‘hat-wearing’ people residing at or passing through the port.⁸ These Christians for the most part are worth hardly more than the non-Christian people. One can take no pride in them. The missionary has a world of trouble trying to govern and keep peace among them. Far from being content to see themselves protected from the domination and rapacity of the Siamese, as soon as they have some litigation between them, which happens frequently, after their affair is judged, the condemned party appeals to the courts, where they obtain the blackest injustices by means of presents [to officials], in such a way that the missionary continually sees his authority compromised by these scoundrels—his own Christians.

State of the Christian religion in Siam and particularly at Mergui

The [Christian] religion is making no progress in these countries. The orders of the king are an absolute brake on the zeal of the missionaries. Under the most rigorous threats of punishment, he forbids [the missionaries] to teach any of his subjects,⁹ in such a way that in the whole kingdom there is not a single Siamese Christian, although they have had our missionaries among them for more than

⁸ ‘Hat-wearing’ people is a reference to Topaz, which was a term for the Luso-Asians in India (derived from the Hindi *topi* for ‘hat’). Like the Dutch and Portuguese heads of their respective communities in Ayutthaya, the French priest was officially recognised as head of the Christian community in Mergui and exercised some basic extraterritorial jurisdiction. Litigation was supposed to be resolved within the community, with the head acting as judge. But if a litigant was dissatisfied with the judgment, he could take the case to a Thai court.

⁹ The January 1731 edict of King Thai Sa, restricting evangelisation by French priests among his Buddhist subjects, was published in the form of a stone inscription, placed at a porch door of the cathedral in Ayutthaya. A duplicate inscription was placed at the French church in Mergui in 1750, five years after Poivre’s visit (Launay 1920 ii: 126–9, 178). The edict did not apply to the regular orders (Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits), who ministered almost exclusively to the Luso-Asian Christians residing in the Portuguese settlements in Ayutthaya, Mergui and a few other places.

sixty years.¹⁰ There does not even appear to be any hope of making any Siamese Christians as time goes on....

When we entered Mergui, a Siamese pilot came on board—and also an interpreter, whose face appeared different to me from that of the Siamese, whose faces I had seen many times in different parts of the Indies. Curiosity impelled me to ask this man in Portuguese what nationality he was. He replied that he was born in Mergui of a Cochinchinese [southern Vietnamese] father. He knew some words of Cochinchinese, which his father had taught him. After many gestures of friendship, he indicated that his father would be very glad to see someone who could speak his language and that he would invite me to go to his home as soon as we made our way into the port....¹¹

The inhabitants of Mergui are extremely poor. Since they eat little and wear hardly anything at all, they need little to live. The dress of the Siamese consists of a simple piece of cloth, which serves as breeches. The women dress entirely like the men, except for those who belong to the rich folk, and cover the breast with a type of handkerchief. The officials wear a Persian-style jacket. I shall not give a long description of their manner of dress, because it has already been given to the public in various accounts about that country....

Characteristics of the Siamese government

...The pursuit of knowledge has become impractical, because no use can be made of it for a livelihood. All the arts have been neglected because, as soon as an individual achieves a little success at one of them, he is obliged to work solely for the king—who rewards him with a beating. The labourer does not dare to cultivate his field, because he is sure that someone will come and take away his harvest. The gardener is deterred from cultivating his vegetables or planting his orchards, because he is sure that someone will come and take away the fruits of his labour.

If nature, which is more productive in this country than elsewhere, produces by chance a fruit tree of a fine kind, on someone's piece of ground, the owner has no choice other than to cut it down quickly, because, if someone discovers to the owner's misfortune that he has such a tree, then as soon as the fruits are setting, soldiers come to count them on behalf of the king or some official. From that time onward, the owner is no more than its trustee. He is responsible for all the pieces of fruit that are missing at the time of maturity—whether they fall by themselves,

¹⁰ The first French missionaries arrived in Mergui in April 1662 and went overland from there to Ayutthaya the same year. Priests of the regular orders (mostly Portuguese, but including many Italians, Spaniards, and other Europeans) had worked in Ayutthaya since about 1565.

¹¹ At this point, Poivre inserts a lengthy account about the elderly father, who was from Quangnam Province and was lost at sea on a fishing boat in the 1670s at the age of ten. Poivre taught him the principles of Christianity and gave him baptism.

or are eaten by birds and insects, or are stolen by neighbours or by the very soldiers who had counted them. The poor wretch alone is responsible, in such a way that, whatever care he takes to watch over them night and day, he is always sure of being ill treated for his efforts, or to be ruined by arbitrary and exorbitant fines....

Those who have read the various accounts of the kingdom of Siam know that the capital of this state is populated by various nationalities, who have areas apportioned to them, either inside or outside of Ayutthaya: Mon, Lao, Christians, Portuguese, Burmese, Malay, Cambodians, Chinese and Cochinchinese. All the miserable peoples, tyrannised in their own countries, come to Siam seeking asylum from the harassment of their princes. Far from finding what they are seeking—to be free people—they become slaves and increase the number of subjects of this new master. They bring themselves to share their unhappy lot in life and become the victims of the most uncivil government. Among the foreigners, especially the Cochinchinese, some of them embrace the Christian religion and through it place themselves under the protection of the French bishop, who represents, in this country, the person of the [French] king and who, in spite of the injustice and bad intention of the government, has been able to maintain the dignity and respect that are due to him.

Riches of Siam

...There is nothing so false as what has been published in different accounts, such as the account of Father Tachard, touching upon the excess of riches of Siam. I do not know where Father Tachard saw the immense treasures of which he speaks—the images of solid gold, these palaces, these buildings, even these cities about which he gives such magnificent descriptions. All of a sudden they disappeared before eyes less biased than his, or rather they never existed except in his extensive account. I understand even less what interest one could have in making a leisurely exaggeration of the riches of this foreign kingdom, its strengths, its power and the alleged inclination of the king [King Narai] and his subjects to embrace our holy religion. In all of that, there is nothing in reality but the most overdone exaggeration and the most ghastly deception.

Reflections on the embassy of the King of Siam to Louis XIV

A traveller who knows about Siam cannot prevent himself from laughing when reading in our accounts about the efforts of the French court in seeking the friendship of this East Indies king, the hopes that it imagined from that notable embassy, which so greatly flattered the vanity of King Louis XIV, with what honours the [Siamese] ambassadors were received, to whom—following the example of the king—our princes and our great men were at a loss in trying to extend courtesies to

them. In them were found agile minds, opinions, education, a noble air and other fine qualities that the French always find in all that comes from afar....

We are too biased in France concerning foreigners, and above all the most distant ones. I do not know the reason why our travellers—above all the missionaries, and among them the Jesuits—give us such favourable and such false ideas about all the countries where they go. With what impudence, and so glaringly, did Father Tachard venture to lay down to Louis XIV in making him believe that, at the far reaches of the universe, there was a great prince, dazzling in the brilliance of his victories, who sought his friendship and who had a longing to embrace his religion? There was never any question of that in Siam. ...One must admit that vanity often brings much ridicule on the most powerful princes and that our great king [Louis XIV] was often insignificant.

I shall not detain myself further on matters concerning the government of Siam. I would not even have said anything at all about it, if those who spoke before me had done so with more truthfulness. The reigning king is a man in his sixties who lets his son rule—one who is a cruel and bloodthirsty prince.¹² As the latter is the [great-]grandson of a usurper, and as there are still some children of the family of the legitimate kings, he has taken every precaution possible to ensure the crown to himself, upon the death of his father. Even so, the Siamese men of affairs believe that, after the current reign, there will be a revolution in favour of the old family, because the prince, about whom I have just spoken, is greatly hated by the officials and the people. Many times he has tried in the most unworthy ways to cause his rivals to perish, but without success. They have always had the dexterity and good fortune to defend themselves from assassins and finally took shelter from prosecutions and treason by donning the robes of a Buddhist monk—which renders them sacred and respectable without binding themselves to anything.¹³

Remarks about the Buddhist monks

Buddhist monks are held in extraordinary veneration in this country. On this point, the king and the officials are in agreement with the people. If an offender or wrong-doer is able to take refuge in their temples, he finds there an assured asylum

¹² This man was Prince Kung, also known by his rank and title as Kromma Khun Sena Phithak. He was a son of King Baromma Kot by the chief queen and served as heir apparent (*uparat*) from 1741 until his death in 1755. The internal politics of the period and rivalries among the numerous princes are discussed in detail by Lailert (1972, chapter 2).

¹³ Launay (1920 ii) documents one of these heirs: a grandson of King Narai (whose daughter became a consort of his successor, King Phet Racha, Poivre's 'usurper'). The prince's name is not recorded in any European source, and in Thai sources he is called only by the honorific *Trat Nòdi*. Poivre's account implies that there were others of the old dynasty. They may have been sons of this prince, who may have been aged about 55–60 at the time of Poivre's visit to Mergui.

against all pursuits of justice.... One finds among them some orderly men—precise observers of the laws and the rules. They are zealous, at least in appearance, for the purity of principles, and panegyrists of virtues, serving as imposing examples of them to the public. If such persons are really what they seem to be, one cannot deny them the greatest praises for maintaining such virtue in the midst of the greatest corruption. At Mergui we saw one of these men, about whom I am speaking. He was an elderly superior of an extensive monastery. The austerity of his principles was painted on his face. His grave, modest and composed exterior inspired respect for his person. He never went out without being accompanied by a crowd of disciples who were admirers¹⁴ ...of his doctrine, which he shaped by pursuing his orations, supported by edifying actions, to which they became witnesses. He highly valued the French missionary who was residing at Mergui and is respectable in any case. From time to time, the monk came to pay the missionary a visit. After the regular compliments in use among all the nations, the monk always began by asking whether the missionary had reason to be satisfied with his Christians and whether they profited from his teachings and made new progress in virtue, adding that what he wanted most in the world was to see crime outlawed and virtue honoured.

I do know how to express the pleasure that I had to see this amiable old man and to ask him different questions about religion, to which he replied with a gravity and air of respectable sincerity....

Specific things that happened to us at Mergui

Let us return to Mergui, which is the place of our respite. We found a Muslim governor there, who received us well.¹⁵ The same was not true of the viceroy of the province, who created many difficulties for us. He issued orders to all the inhabitants of the country, forbidding them to supply us with any food. The reason for such unworthy treatment derived from our not having any substantial presents to offer him. Having been pillaged by the English, whose prisoners we still were,¹⁶ we scarcely had even any old clothes to wear. In all nations other than

¹⁴ The description of Mergui in the Lyon manuscript ends with the word 'admirers'. Malleret restored the full text by inserting, from this point, a continuation of the text in another manuscript owned by René de Pusy La Fayette, a direct descendant of Poivre.

¹⁵ Clearly this Muslim governor occupied a post separate from that of the Governor of Tenasserim Province, who had viceregal powers. The provincial seat was a short distance up the Tenasserim River and away from the deep-water anchorage of the port of Mergui. This Muslim may have been the governor of Mergui itself or possibly an officially recognised head of the resident Muslim trading community. He may have been responsible for matters relating to all arriving and departing ships and for trading affairs in the port.

¹⁶ Poivre and his companions, although set at liberty, were still technically prisoners of the British for the duration of the war in Europe, which lasted almost another three years.

Siam, we would have found some generous souls from whom we could have got some help. In Mergui, far from being offered anything, we were asked to give.

The viceroy, although informed of our sad situation, absolutely insisted that presents be found for him. We were facing an impossibility to satisfy his greed, and for us, he made that a crime. As we were seized with hunger, and the matter was pressing, we pillaged ourselves further in order to put together, as best we could, a little present that might merit the protection of the viceroy. We gathered together some handkerchiefs, two or three old mirrors, a gun (which was the sole weapon we had on board), together with a little areca nut. That was our present. After a long dispute with the officers of the viceroy, who were not at all satisfied with the smallness of its value, it was finally accepted as a favour and out of compassion for our poverty.

Is there anything in the world so crude and so shameful as this greed of a man in a position to demand a present from foreigners, in order for them to obtain permission to buy food in the country? ... We were not let off the hook by this present alone. It was necessary to give one to the rajah, to the second Phra Khlang, whom the king had sent to this province to examine the conduct of the viceroy.¹⁷ There was no one, down to the scribes of the officials, who did not also want to receive a present of his own.

After getting permission to buy food, there was the question of money. We had none. Even so, we had to provide a bare existence for more than sixty men. We were constrained therefore to sell the cargo of our brigantine and to do that on a retail basis, as there are no traders in the country rich enough to take on, in a single purchase, a considerable part of the goods. Our little bit of trading sufficed to feed us. Since we were afraid it would not be adequate, we took the precaution in the early days to write to Monseigneur de Lolière, the French bishop in Siam, asking him to get the king to make some advances of money to us, to help us with a bare existence. We went three months without having any reply. Finally, at the end of this time, we saw the arrival of a *kha luang* (a *kha luang* is an envoy of the court), who brought us 2,000 ticals (worth 3 *livres* 10 *sols* each) on behalf of the king, who made no difficulty in giving us this advance, all the more because he had

¹⁷ The Thai minister known as the Phra Khlang was responsible for relations with foreign countries and for maritime trading affairs. He was also responsible for the administration of the province of Tenasserim, which was primarily a maritime trading base and entrepôt for the trans-peninsular trade to Ayutthaya. The 'second Phra Khlang', as a senior official in the ministry on an inspection tour, would have been independent of the viceroy. Most likely this person was the man with the title Phra Chula Ratcha Montri, a deputy minister who headed the Department of Western Maritime Affairs (Krom Tha Khwa, literally 'Ports Department of the Right'). He was responsible for westward trade (the Indian Ocean and beyond) as well as the Indonesian archipelago. Inspectors were sent by the king to provincial towns only under unusual circumstances, and the very fact that someone was sent out implies some irregularity or wrong-doing on the part of the governor.

recently sent one of his vessels to Pondichéry, to get the governor of this French colony to establish reciprocal trade with Siam. He knew that his envoy had been well received and was entrusted with considerable presents for His Majesty. Our captain, reflecting on the fact that there was no more than a month at most to wait for the end of our seasonal lay-over and the return of the monsoon, in order to go to Pondichéry, accepted only 500 ticals of this loan and left the other 1,500 in the hands of the French missionary, who was entrusted to account for them to the king, who had called him to the capital for some specific matters.¹⁸

When we arrived at Mergui, we found an armed vessel of the king in the port. It was destined to hunt for the pirate ship that we had encountered, which was still cruising among the islands, waiting for the vessel that the king of Siam had sent to Pondichéry, as I just said, and which should be returning at any moment with a rich cargo.

However pressing the danger may have been for this vessel, which would certainly have been captured if it had appeared, our Siamese officials did not bestir themselves to expedite the ship that was to be armed to hunt the enemy. The French missionary protested in vain, pressing and pleading with the viceroy about the troublesome consequences that could result from continued delays. But matters did not move any further forward. Sixty or eighty French officers, soldiers and sailors offered to go at their own expense and peril to look for the pirate ship, on condition that they were given a ship, gunpowder and shot. But that still did not satisfy the Siamese official. In addition, he wanted the missionary and our captain to be the guarantors for the vessel and to be accountable in the name of the French Company for all mishaps that might occur to the king's vessel in case of combat.

After many difficulties, these gentlemen remained as guarantors that the ship would be brought back to the port of Mergui—excepting the perils and fortunes of the sea.¹⁹ The viceroy subscribed to this arrangement and sent the ship out, under the command of Mr Faguais, who had been the second in command of the *Charles*, when the pirates seized her.²⁰

The armed vessels fitted out by the Siamese consisted of two ships. The first was armed by the French and had a company of about 100 men. The second was armed by the local people and had a mixed company of lascars, Siamese and local

¹⁸ Father Cauna went to Ayutthaya in 1746. He worked there and subsequently in Chanthaburi, where he died in 1756.

¹⁹ In other words, the two French guarantors would not be held responsible if the Siamese ship were lost because of a natural calamity such as a storm. The date 17 September 1745 is in the margin of Poivre's manuscript and may be the date of setting out on this brief expedition, as ships from the east coast of India tended to reach Mergui in September.

²⁰ Malleret (1968: 69 n. 2) identifies this ship as the *Saint Charles*. He identifies the captain as Jean Le Faguais (or Jean Faguays) of Saint-Malo, who had left France on 3 January 1742 as an officer-trainee on another ship.

Portuguese—all of them incapable and useless. The voyages of the one and of the other were not long. The first ship went out beyond all the islands in search of her enemy, which she failed to encounter. During all the delays of our Siamese, the pirates had become impatient, when they did not see the arrival of the vessel that they were hoping for, had made up their minds and had gone to seek their fortune elsewhere. Thus after being out on business for eight days, the vessel armed by the French returned alone to the port, where she found her comrade, which had already come to shelter herself from the mishaps of war. This little ship had gone out only for form's sake and went no farther than King's Island, where she remained hidden behind an island while her comrade was out on business. Regardless of how much the viceroy may have been convinced of the uselessness of this little ship, he did not fail to arm her, in order to make his master [the king] believe that he was zealous in his service, that there was no lack of sailing men in his province, always ready to march out in the defence of the state—and even more than all of that, to have the opportunity, under the fine pretext of service to the king, to demand exorbitant contributions from the people, for his personal gain and to show to the king imaginary expenses, which he was certain of getting repaid to himself, as though they were real.

Story of the destruction of the Ostend Company

Some of the Frenchmen, who willingly embarked on the king's vessel to go out and hunt for the pirate ship, had previously been the companions of this pirate ship. Even though of different nationality, they were all in the service of the Ostend Company, under the command of Mr Schonamille, governor for the emperor at the Bankibasara trading house on the Ganges.²¹ This German governor, having had some entanglements with the Muslims, in whose territory his governorship happened to be, finally made up his mind to declare war on them, based on the powers that he received from his master, the emperor. At first he had good fortune in making war and seized many richly laden Muslim ships. These initial successes drew to him a large number of deserters—officers, soldiers, sailors—from all the European

²¹ François de Schonamille was apparently a Fleming (not a German) and was a commander (not a governor) in charge of the Ostend Company's trading post at Bankibasara in the delta of the Ganges, in 1726 and again during 1730–44. The company was an association of Flemish merchants in the Austrian Netherlands (now part of Belgium), which was under the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor Karl VI (r. 1711–40), who was also Archduke of Austria. The succession of his daughter, Maria Theresa, as Archduchess of Austria and Queen of Hungary (among other titles), precipitated the War of the Austrian Succession 1740–8, in which most major European powers were involved (notably Austria, Britain, the Netherlands and Sardinia against France, Prussia, Bavaria and Spain). Poivre and his French companions were caught in this war, in relation to the British and Dutch who had been their captors earlier in his story of his voyage from Guangzhou in China by way of Batavia to Mergui.

trading posts established along the Ganges. With these reinforcements, he continued to wage war to his advantage. But he was unable to save his trading house from an invasion of Muslims [ca. October 1740], and he made up his mind to go in search of an establishment in Pegu, which was very well situated for his plan for privateering against Muslim ships. Schonamille arrived in the river of Syriam, which is the most-frequented port of Pegu, with five sailing ships and some brigantines. He first appealed to the Italian bishop [Mgr Gallizia, a Barnabite], who was in charge of the mission in this kingdom, in order to gain the king's permission to establish himself in his port. The king promised something and meanwhile summoned the head of the foreigners to his court, under the pretext of settling with him the conditions under which he would allow them to establish a trading post in his domain.

The governor, with imprudence and too much good faith, left his squadron, taking with him only 100 men, and went to the city of Pegu. There, instead of giving him an audience, the king had him amused for some time, in order to gain time to assemble troops. Finally, at the end of some days, when the German made up his mind to go back and join his ships, where he had begun to see he would be more secure than in the heart of this barbaric kingdom, all of a sudden he found himself surrounded by an armed corps of more than 15,000 men, who attacked him in his boats. After some hours of defence, all of them were massacred: the governor, the bishop, one of his missionaries and all those who had followed him on this unfortunate journey, with the exception of four men who, with the advantage of the night, saved themselves in the forest, where they exposed themselves to the fury of tigers and elephants, in preference to being prey to barbarians. They reached Syriam, where they sounded the alarm to the squadron, informing it of the massacre of its chief and the betrayal of the Peguans.

At the first news of this notable event, the captains of the ships, instead of agreeing among themselves to wreak vengeance for such foul treachery, thought only of fleeing, each his own way. The ships that were ready set sail and left the river. The others remained stranded and exposed to the undertakings of the barbarians, who soon appeared in a multitude on the river banks. At first they took advantage of the tide, to send many fireships upon the vessels in order to set them on fire. Their undertaking was ineffective, because of a manoeuvre of the Europeans who, placing themselves under the cover of their artillery, seized two of their vessels, set fire to the brigantines (which were laden with rupees, but which they could not save), made a great slaughter of the barbarians (who were jumping through the flames and the gunfire in order to pillage the silver of the burning boats) and set sail for Mergui, where we found them. As they were not in agreement among themselves, they parted company. The English were obliged by necessity to seize a vessel, as I said above, and to become pirates. It was they who stopped us at the entry to Mergui. The French sold their vessel in order to have enough to live on.

And nearly all of them made the crossing with us to Pondichéry, where they were pardoned for their desertion, in consideration of the good will they showed in going on the vessel of the king of Siam to hunt their old comrades-turned-pirates.

To understand the reason for the unjust treatment on this occasion by the king of Pegu—to those who expected to find an assured refuge in his domain, like all foreigners who were accustomed to come with confidence to do their trading in his ports—one has to know what the situation was at that time in this kingdom neighbouring on Siam.

Revolts of Pegu

The Peguans [the coastal kingdom of the Mon] had just thrown off the yoke of the Avanese [the inland kingdom of the Burmese], whose prince was their legitimate sovereign. These rebels chose a king of their nation [*Saming Dhaw*], whom they brought out from the obscurity of a pagoda, where he served the idols, to place him on the throne. Under this new chief, the mutineers gained some advantages over the troops of the king of Ava, but these were not adequate to calm the alarm and fears of a rebel people. When the European squadron appeared, they imagined that it had come to attack them in conjunction with the king of Ava. Some imprudent statements by the English who were in the squadron and who really did intend to establish themselves in the country by force, together with the mistrust so natural in the mind of a usurper, obliged him to ward off those whom he imagined to be his enemies by betraying them.

While we were at Mergui, we learned that some ambassadors of the king of Ava had come, in order to solicit help from the court of Siam against the rebels. Their presents, which were considerable, were well received. As a reward, they carried back to their country some fine words—the king of Siam not really being in a state to defend his own kingdom, were it to be attacked, much less to give help to his neighbours.

The province of Tenasserim was filled with Peguan and Avanese refugees who, to avoid the misfortunes of the war that was devastating their homeland, had withdrawn into the calm lands of Siam. Among these fugitives, we saw the prince of Tavoy, a lord of the family of the king of Ava and formerly the governor of the province of Tavoy, adjacent to Tenasserim. As he did not want to join the revolt of the Peguans, they drove him out of his governorship and made themselves the masters of it. To avoid worse treatment, he came and placed himself under the protection of the king of Siam, with his wives and children.

The acquaintances that we had the opportunity to make during our respite with a portion of these deserters—foreigners like us in the land—gave us the means of making enquiries with regard to Pegu and the way of life of the inhabitants, whose customs and practices are the same as those of the Siamese. In the matter of the face,

the Peguan is less disfavoured by nature than the Siamese; the women are rather beautiful, have white skin and regular features, and they are a little short in stature, but in proportion. Modesty is not great among the women, and their way of dressing is indecent. Their whole outfit consists of a chemise, which goes down only as far as the waistband and is entirely open in the front, leaving the whole bosom exposed. Their skirt, which is a kind of underskirt, is likewise open in the front, leaving the whole thigh in view. With such immodesty in the women, it is easy to imagine what [sexual] irregularity there might be in the customs in this country....

Trade of Siam and particularly of Mergui

The trade of Siam is not considerable. Besides the fact that the country is poor and furnishes little merchandise, the king, who is the sole trader in his domain, causes so many difficulties for and injustices to foreigners who go there to trade, that he has discouraged everyone, except the Muslims, Chinese and Dutch. The Muslims come to Mergui every year in September and October, bringing two or three cargoes of coarse cloth,²² which they exchange, with the king, for tin,²³ ivory and elephants. Their ordinary vessels carry fourteen or fifteen of them. There is a considerable profit on these animals—it is 400 for 100—but one runs the risk of losing everything because, if the crossing from Mergui to the Coromandel Coast is a bit long, the elephants cannot withstand it, and all of them die. The king sells them to the Muslims for 200 *pagodas* and the Muslims resell them at 700 and 800.²⁴ The *pagoda* is worth about 8 *livres* of our money. The Mughal lords are greatly interested in these animals, for which they make great expenditures, and they train them for war.

²² The main cloth manufacturing centres were close to the east coast of India. The cloth imported through Mergui was carried by oxcart across the peninsula to the coast of the Gulf of Siam and from there to Ayutthaya, which was a major market.

²³ Poivre uses the term *calin*, which usually refers to an amalgam of tin and lead, both of which were mined in the peninsula. This product was in great demand in China as a packaging material for the tea trade. Poivre describes *calin* as though it were a mineral extracted at Tavoy, rather than an alloy. The description suggests that the tin ore mined at Tavoy included a certain amount of lead in it and that the smelters processed the mixture of the two ores without any attempt to separate them. The more-familiar term 'tin' is used in the translation.

²⁴ For lack of data, we can make only a rough approximation of the value of the *pagoda* (a coin in use on the Coromandel Coast of India) in relation to the Thai baht. Quiason (1966: 48, 172) provides exchange rates between the *pagoda* and the Spanish dollar in the early 1700s and in 1763. Assuming 27.064 grammes of silver in a Spanish dollar, and 15 g in a Thai baht, and ignoring the fineness of the silver, 1 *pagoda* would have been worth about 3 baht in the early 1700s and about 2.8 baht in 1763. Hence the 1745 price of an elephant at Mergui may have been in the range of 560–600 baht.

Trade of the Chinese

Every year the Chinese send to Siam four or five junks,²⁵ loaded with tea, porcelain, silks and various kinds of medicines of little value, for which the king pays in tin, sapan wood, aloes wood and ivory. Sometimes they carry rice back—on which there would be a rather considerable profit, if their vessels were larger and could hold a large cargo. Among the Chinese who go to Siam, many have become familiar with the country and have established themselves there. Today they form a considerable community. They are the ones who carry on the retail trade throughout the kingdom, where they spread out and establish themselves, as they do in the capital. These foreigners number more than 6,000 in Siam. The multitude, which increases every year, is in a position to deliver a dangerous blow to the country. It was not long ago that they rebelled, taking advantage for that of the absence of the king, who had gone to perform his devotions at a pagoda distant from the capital.²⁶ Fortunately, the prince-heir hastened quickly, quelled the sedition, arrested more than 100 of the mutineers and hanged them at the gateway of the other Chinese, with an interdiction to bury them....²⁷

Trade of the Dutch in Siam

Today, the Dutch are the only Europeans who go to trade in Siam. They carry there poor-quality fabrics from the coast of India, pepper and some spices. In return they get tin, sapan wood and ivory. Their trade in this country is trivial. It takes all of the Dutch patience to put up with so many difficulties that the king makes for them. The Dutch are, moreover, badly handled by the king, who owes their company a considerable sum, which the company will have to go to much trouble to get back. Some years ago, they asked for payment and threatened to use violence. That did not move things forward at all. They gathered together their stored goods and went back to Batavia.²⁸ After threatening the king with a squad-

²⁵ Poivre is discussing junk arrivals at Ayutthaya (not Mergui) and Chinese affairs at the Thai capital. A comparison can be made at Batavia: perhaps the busiest port for Chinese trade at this time. During the decade 1735–45, an average of 12.4 junks arrived annually at Batavia (calculated from data in Souza 1986: 140). By the end of the century, however, the pattern had reversed, and Bangkok had become the busiest port in the region.

²⁶ The Thai chronicles (Cushman 2000: 426–7) give the date CS 1096 Bhadrapada 25 (22 September 1734) for the Chinese rebellion, recording that it began when the king was on an elephant hunt in Lopburi. Most versions of the chronicles state that only 40 rebels were executed.

²⁷ This gate must have been Pratu Chin (the Chinese Gate), a large water-gate on the south-east side of Ayutthaya. The Chinese district was concentrated along the canal inside this gate, close to the anchorage area of the junks and other ocean-going ships.

²⁸ Poivre's account is not entirely accurate. See Lefebvre to Directors, 30 May 1741 (Launay 1920: 141–2) and Ruangsilp (2007: 191) for the February 1741 departure of the Dutch following a serious incident in which some Dutch sailors and soldiers attacked a group of bhikkhus at a cremation, wounding one of them (who died a few days later). The Dutch compound then came under siege by Thai forces, and the Dutch were allowed through bribery to withdraw in peace.

ron of warships the following year, to make him pay, they did not appear for two years. At the end of that time, they sent a trading ship with a letter for the king. The ship's captain, who was carrying it, was told that it is not the custom in Siam to receive a letter unaccompanied by a present, and the ship was sent back, unable to get permission to do any trading.

The following year they sent a present, but no letter, and they were told that the one could not be received without the other. Like the first time, the ship went back. Finally, the third year, which was the one when we were at Mergui—at a time when all in Siam feared the rancour of the Dutch and were expecting a deadly war, according to news that arrived from Batavia, where the governor had made it known that he wanted to send warships to Siam—instead of that, they witnessed the arrival of a trading ship, which carried a representative, presents and a letter.²⁹ They were well received, and it appeared that henceforth the Dutch would continue their trading in that country. So many tactful dealings on the part of the Dutch with this king, who is without might and without defences, gives proof of the weakness of these [Dutch] republicans in the Indies. It is quite certain that, if they had the forces, they would not have failed to make use of them, to get themselves repaid. They had need of their forces at that time, being threatened by war with France.

The French, the English and the Portuguese went to Siam in former times [to trade], but these nations, less tied to their trading than the Dutch are, were discouraged by trading that they could not do honourably and without being exposed to constantly renewed injustices. For some years, the English had a trading house in Siam itself, but they completely abandoned it. The French had posts and little fortresses in various places in the kingdom, which they were obliged to abandon at the time of the revolution involving the renowned Constance, the Phra Khlang. There are vestiges still remaining at Mergui of a fort that they had begun to build, which dominated the whole port.³⁰

²⁹ If Poivre is correct, the Dutch made two unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation in 1743 and 1744, during Gustaaf W. van Imhoff's tenure as governor-general (1743–50), and finally resumed regular trading at Ayutthaya in 1745.

³⁰ The English East India Company and private English traders were involved primarily at Ayutthaya and Mergui at various times from 1612, when the first Company ship visited Ayutthaya. After the massacre of a large number of English traders at Mergui in 1687, English trade ceased. The French Company established relations with Siam in 1680, but its agent departed in November 1688, during the withdrawal of the short-lived 1687–8 French garrison (placed at the disposal of King Narai by Louis XIV). Sketches of 1688 plans for a French fortress (never actually built) at Bangkok are reproduced in Araphin (1998: 63) and Smithies (2002: 43). For the Mergui plans, see Jacq-Hergoualc'h (1993: 222). The powerful Greek adventurer, Constantine Phaulkon (called 'Monsieur Constance' by the French), had the rank of a minister at the Thai court at the time of his execution in 1688, but he was never appointed to the office of Phra Khlang (minister responsible for treasury affairs and maritime trade).

Today, the French no longer go, except to Mergui, where the Company sends a ship every year, less to engage in trading than to cut timber on the islands for the use of the colony of Pondichéry. While waiting for the end of the seasonal lay-over—the period when the Coromandel Coast cannot be reached—ships are obliged to go to the coast to the east and take shelter, from the bad weather, in the ports of Mergui or Pegu, and in the roadstead of Aceh.

Trading that can be done at Mergui

Although the [French] ships that go to Mergui are not exactly sent there to engage in trade, that does not prevent some good trading from being done. Tin alone is a subject that is worthy of attention. By going to a little trouble, one can gather together a considerable cargo of it. It is sold at a cheap price, and there is a profit in taking it to the [Coromandel] coast.

The tin found at Mergui comes from Tavoy, a province of Pegu, where it is sold for 37 ticals per bar, which amounts to 6 Chinese piculs or about 7 *quintals* of our weight. (A picul [60.5 kg] of tin is worth 12 taels [0.454 kg of silver] in China.) From Tavoy to Mergui, it rises in price by 20 ticals per bar and sells there [in Mergui] for 56 ticals [hence a profit of 51%]. Every year Tavoy supplies more than a thousand bars. Rather than making purchases at Mergui, it would be better to go to Tavoy itself, which is the place where the tin is extracted. That is a voyage of two days, and the appropriate time for it is the month of December. One must carry silver and coarse cloth there [to exchange for tin].

Additional tin comes to Mergui from the island of Janselon [Ujung Salang (Phuket)], which can supply 300 bars of it. It is extracted also in some villages on the river of this port [the Tenasserim area]. The two settlements of Koiseman and Lamont can supply 100 bars of it. Thus one can gather together at Mergui a cargo of 1,400 bars of tin.

This is without mentioning arak, which is a very common drink in that country and is rather marketable in the Indies. This alcoholic drink is extracted from a type of palm that grows in the swamps, which the people of the country call nipa [*Nipa fruticans*]. This tree bears fruit that comes in clusters, like the fruit of the banana plant. When the fruit forms, it is cut and the stem, or rather the stalk of the fruit, is carefully inserted into an earthen sludge. The stalk then distills the alcoholic drink, which they call arak. After passing through a distillation apparatus, it acquires great strength and becomes a rather good ingredient for punch—which is a drink composed of a mixture of lime juice, arak and a little nutmeg and sugar. This arak is cheap. They give five flasks of it for a tical.

Also found at Mergui is a wood oil that is a type of polish—excellent for beautifying and preserving furniture and wood panelling. It is extracted by making a cut on a tree and placing a fire at the cut. As soon as the heat begins to penetrate,

the oil flows out in abundance. It sells for 10 *mayons* for a Bengal jar or a picul that weighs 120 of our *livres*. There is a profit in carrying it to Pondichéry.

The *mayon* is one-quarter of a tical. It is worth 15 *sols* of our money, and the tical is worth 3 *livres*. Eighty ticals make a catty [Thai *chang*] according to the way of reckoning in the country. Below the *mayon* there are *vangués*, which are tin coins, the value of which is arbitrary and changes according to the price of tin in the market.

Natural history of Mergui

The land is very fertile in this part of the kingdom of Siam, as it is in all the other parts. The lazy Siamese harvests a double crop every year when he wants to, without putting himself to any trouble, so that in spite of the small number of farmers who are in the country, rice is cheap.

The land produces all sorts of excellent fruit, such as the mangosteen, the durian, the *rangoustan*, the jack-fruit, the mango, the Melaka rose-apple, the red rose-apple, the banana, the orange, the guava, the coconut, the areca nut, the pineapple—in a word, the best fruits that are found in the Indies.³¹

The forests there are filled with game. Hunters find harts, wild boar, gazelles, antelopes, porcupines and roe deer. But the hunt is often interrupted by encounters with elephants, tigers and bears.

In these same forests there are a lot of pheasants, wild chickens, two kinds of green wood-pigeon (whose flesh is very delicate), thrushes (whose black and azure-blue plumage makes them very interesting), parakeets, parrots and an infinity of birds that are found in no other places—such as the toucan, the king of the crows, the violet humming bird, the red hoopoe, a kind of jay and so on.

In that country there is also a very unusual type of winged animal: a [flying] squirrel that has a type of wing. One sees there monkeys of every type, the most interesting of which are those that they call *honques* or wild men.³² They come closer to the human face than all the other types of monkeys.

The reptiles and insects are no less varied there. Among the former, the most remarkable ones that I have seen are the flying lizard, the *jackai* (a type of large lizard, green, with red and black variegation)³³ and the chameleon.

³¹ For the jack-fruit, *Artocarpus integrifolia* (*Urticaceae*), Poivre uses the Portuguese name *jaca* (Thai ขนุน). For the rose-apple, he uses the Portuguese term *jambon*, referring probably to *Eugenia malaccensis* (*Myrtaceae*, Thai ชมพู่แดง). I have been unable to identify Poivre's *rangoustan*, but sapodilla (Thai ละมุด) seems logical.

³² *Honque* seems to be Poivre's pronunciation of the Malay term *ungka*, meaning a gibbon.

³³ Poivre's *jackai* may be one of the water monitors (*Varanus salvator*), which can grow to a length of about 2.5 metres.

Among the insects, the one that appeared the most interesting to me is a type of beetle, which ordinarily stays at the top of trees. There, by means of two little drums next to its chest, which it continuously beats with its wings, this insect creates a noise that makes it appear to be a large animal, whereas it is no larger than a cricket.

The natural history of Mergui could, by itself, fill a very interesting volume, but during a stay of four months, it was not possible for me to educate myself thoroughly in this subject. I found the forests, everywhere, filled with very interesting flowers, trees and plants, but an examination and description of each one individually required time that I did not have. I examined some of them, and I am adding their descriptions here, just as I prepared them, and not very methodically.

Translator's epilogue

At this point in the text reconstructed by Malleret, there are four brief, technical descriptions by Poivre from the viewpoint of a botanist: a tree he calls the Thai laurel, another he calls the Thai lilac, a foul-smelling tree that is probably *Sterculia foetida* (*Sterculiaceae*, Thai ส้มโอง, also called the Java olive) and *Piper betle* (*Piperaceae*, Thai พญ). The last-named is a vine cultivated for its leaves, which are an ingredient (along with lime and areca nut) in the masticatory commonly called 'betel'. In describing the leaves, flowers and fruit of the trees, he attempts to make very precise measurements of tiny constituent parts. These descriptions are omitted from the present translation, as they appear to be of only minor historiographical interest to botanists.

The extant text of Poivre's memoir concerning Mergui ends with these botanical descriptions. It does not mention his departure from Mergui, or the crossing of his ship to India, which must have taken place in December 1745. It seems likely that Poivre compiled a continuous narrative and that the part concerning his voyage from Mergui has been lost. In the extant manuscript, Poivre turns his attention next to the Coromandel Coast and begins his description of the European and Asian inhabitants of the French colony of Pondichéry, where he spent most of the year 1746.

From India he went to Port Louis on the Île de France (the island of Mauritius). His efforts to make his way home were frustrated by delays on the coast of Africa in 1747, capture a second time by the British and detention at Guernsey. He was finally released, after the negotiations for the peace treaty had begun in Europe, and he reached France again in June 1748. Only four months later, having left the French missionary society, he sailed for Port Louis, to begin a new chapter in his life as an agent of the French trading company in search of spice trees from the East Indies.

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Pierre Poivre (1719-1786)