

A supposed Dutch Translation of a Siamese
State Paper in 1688.

The Siamese Embassy which was sent in 1686 by King Narayana to the Court of France attracted a great deal of attention, and a full account of what the Ambassadors did in France and what they saw, together with the remarks they made, was published in Paris and Lyons in 4 small 12° volumes as an extract from the *Mercure Galant*.

The exact title runs :

“ VOYAGE
DES
AMBASSADEURS
DE SIAM
EN FRANCE

Contenant la Reception qui leur a esté faite dans les Villes où ils ont passé, leur Entrée à Paris, les Ceremonies observées dans l'Audience qu'ils ont eue du Roy & de la Maison Royale, les Complimens qu'ils ont faits, la Description des Lieux où ils ont esté, & ce qu'ils ont vu de remarquable sur tout ce qu'ils ont veu.

A PARIS

AV PALAIS

(VERSO.)

A PARIS,

Chez G. DE LUYNE, au Palais, dans la Salle des Merciers, à la Justice.

Chez la Veuve C. BLAGEART, Court-Neuve du Palais, AU DAUPHIN.

Et T. GIRARD, au Palais, dans la Grande Salle, à l'Envie.

M. DC. LXXXVI.

Avec Privilege du Roi.”

The Lyons edition is identical with the Paris one, with the sole exception that the dedicatory epistles accompanying each volume are different.

The book was frequently quoted in the eighteenth century in descriptions of Siam, and there existed amongst others also a German translation under the title of:—

“Reyssbeschreibung der Abgesandten von Siam in Frankreich. Inhaltend wie dieselbe in den Städten ihrer Durchreyse empfangen worden, deren Einzug zu Paris, die Ceremonien, so in der ihnen von dem König, auch dem königl. Haus ertheilten Audienz observirt worden, ihre Complimenten etc. aus dem Französischen ins Teutsche übersetzt. Frankfurt, A. M., 1687. 12. I. II. III. IV. Theil.”

The account, it is true, must be considered as an eulogy of Louis XIV. and his Court, and the sayings of the Ambassadors must as regards their genuineness be taken *cum grano salis*.

Nothing is apparently known of any account which the Ambassadors made on their return to Siam, although in the French records “the notes which the Secretaries took of everything they saw” are continually referred to.

Whether the Ambassadors in returning to Siam had time to prepare such a report, must remain doubtful. After their return the troublesome times commenced which ended with the overthrow of Constantin Faulcon, the death of King Narayana and the ascension of Phra Debraja (the Pitracha of the French records) under the title of Somdet Phra Mahaburus.

It is quite true that the surviving Ambassador sided with Phra Debraja, by whom he was employed in carrying out the somewhat intricate negotiations with the French garrison and factory; so it is possible that a report regarding his previous mission might have been made. Unfortunately, however, through the sack and destruction of Ayuddhya in 1762 all documents kept in the Archives of the State were destroyed.

Now in 1688 there was published in Batavia a book under the title of:—

“ VERHAAL

Dat de Ambassadeurs van

Siam

Aan haar Koning gedaan hebben van't geen zij in

Vrankrijk vernomen hebben van de algemeene

toestant van Europa, van de manier van

regeren en de hoedanigheden van

ijder Christen Vorst, en andere

bijzonderheden rakende

het Christendom.

Uyt het Siams vertaalt.

Gedrukt in Batavia MDCLXXXVIII.”

There existed thus a faint hope, that we should find in the Dutch document the lost Siamese state paper.

A glance at the contents of the book, which was acquired for the Library of the Ministry of the Interior, showed this hope to be fallacious.

With a view to getting, however, the fullest information possible, His Royal Highness Prince Damrong caused a letter of enquiry to be written to the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen,” and with their usual courtesy an answer was returned by Doctor F. de Haan, which we are enabled to reproduce.

Dr. de Haan, writes under date of July 24th, 1905.

“ Nothing is known in particular about the Verhaal as printed at Batavia in 1688. In the ‘Dagregister gehouden in 't Kasteel Batavia’ an entry is made under date of February 3rd, 1688, regarding the receipt of a letter from the factory of Siam dated December 23rd, 1687, in which the return of the Ambassadors of Siam from the Court of Louis XIV. is mentioned.

On the 8th December, 1688, a second letter is registered containing the announcement of the death of the King.

The book in question must therefore have been written between February 3rd, and December 9th, 1688.

The contents of the book make it highly improbable, that it should have been written by one of the Siamese Ambassadors, the more so as in the 'Daghregister' no mention is made of any such report having been sent to Batavia.

The book reveals a more than superficial knowledge of European policy. A Siamese Ambassador would certainly not have learnt such an unbiased judgment at the Court of Versailles.

Furthermore the quotation on page 20 of a saying of the Byzantine Emperor Nicophoros is not likely to have been made by a Siamese Ambassador, nor would he enumerate famous names of antiquity as he does on page 29.

It is not credible that the Ambassador would have mentioned the sonde (sin) of living with more than one wife, as he does on page 6. The pages 18 and 19 show a remarkable knowledge of Pascal's Lettres Provinciales in explaining the practice of the Jesuits.

The book, it appears, is written by a Calvinist. If a guess at the authorship may be ventured it would be that of Governor-General Johannes Camphuys (1684-1691), who was a somewhat prolific writer, and whose moderate views would agree well with the unprejudiced consideration of the papistic King James II. of England on page 12. This authorship would probably explain the anonymity of the work."

[O. F.]