

## Abstract/Résumé analytique

### Rituals of Majesty: France, Siam, and Court Spectacle in Royal Image-Building at Versailles in 1685 and 1686

Ronald S. Love

*On 1 September 1686, Louis XIV welcomed the ambassadors of Phra Narai, King of Siam, in a great public audience at Versailles. Held in the sumptuous Hall of Mirrors, it was the most spectacular reception the Sun King ever granted to an embassy during his long reign. What made it unique was the way in which the French court copied as nearly as possible the outward forms of Siamese royal ceremonial, as recounted by various French visitors to the Asian kingdom and the chevalier de Chaumont, who had served as Louis's ambassador to Phra Narai the previous year. For the object of the reception was to present the French monarch as an omnipotent Asian despot, equal to the Siamese monarch in every way, to give the envoys an exalted idea of Louis's greatness, power, and magnificence according to eastern expectations. At the same time, the French king also impressed his own courtiers with a theatrical display of royal absolutism that went far beyond European precepts. What this event reveals in particular, therefore, is how the Sun King manipulated royal French protocol and Siamese rituals of majesty to assert his absolutist claims in a visual way, by magnifying his image and gloire both personally and symbolically as French monarch and the living embodiment of the state.*

*Le 1 septembre 1686, Louis XIV accueillit les ambassadeurs de Phra Narai, roi de Siam, dans une grande audience publique à Versailles. Tenue dans la somptueuse Galerie des Glaces, c'était la réception la plus spectaculaire que le Roi Soleil jamais accorda à une ambassade pendant la longue durée de son règne. Ce qu'il la fit unique était la manière dans laquelle la cour française imita aussi exactement que possible les formes extérieures de cérémonie royale siamoises, comme racontèrent non seulement par plusieurs visiteurs français au royaume asiatique, mais aussi par le chevalier de Chaumont qui servit comme l'ambassadeur de Louis près de Phra Narai l'année précédente. L'objet principal de la réception était de présenter le monarque français dans la guise d'un despote asiatique et tout-puissant, le pareil du monarque siamois en tout choses, et de donner les envoyés une idée exaltée du grandeur, puissance et magnificence de Louis selon des attentes orientales. En même temps, le roi français impressionna ses propres courtiers avec une exposition théâtrale de l'absolutisme royal qui alla plus loin que des préceptes européens. Ainsi, cet événement révèle la manière dans laquelle le Roi Soleil manipula le protocole royal français et aussi les rituels de majesté siamoise pour affirmer ses prétentions absolutiste dans une façon visuelle, par le moyens de magnifier son image et sa gloire tant personnelle que symbolique, comme le monarque français et la personnification vivante de l'État.*

Ronald S. Love

## RITUALS OF MAJESTY: FRANCE, SIAM, AND COURT SPECTACLE IN ROYAL IMAGE-BUILDING AT VERSAILLES IN 1685 AND 1686<sup>1</sup>

In his relation of the kingdom of Siam published in 1688, Father Nicolas Gervaise of the Société des Missions-Étrangères described in detail the deep distinction that the Siamese monarch drew between envoys of neighbouring rulers who were “almost all tributaries of his crown,” dependent on his protection and “inferior to him in wealth and power,” and “ambassadors of emperors and kings who are [his] equals.” Where the former were treated “in a somewhat cavalier manner” to ensure “that they are made aware of the difference between the king of Siam and their own masters who have sent them,” the latter were received with great pomp and ceremony in the presence of the monarch himself, who then entertained them lavishly “to give them an exalted idea of his greatness and magnificence.”<sup>2</sup>

Such was the nature of Siamese diplomacy and protocol in the late seventeenth century, a protocol based upon ancient traditions of dominant powers and client kingdoms in a pattern that prevailed throughout the Far East. How different was the practice in Europe, where, despite continual disputes over precedence, diplomacy was not based upon tributary relationships, the concept of equal sovereign states was taking root and the notion of the balance of power was developing slowly. Separately, the two systems worked well within their own environments, where expectations were the same and habits of procedure were accepted. But when they came into direct contact with each other, as they did increasingly in the seventeenth century because of expanding European interests in the Far East, problems arose on both sides in trying to bridge the cultural gap that divided them. Indeed, as one modern historian of this question observes, foreign relations between Asia and Europe in this period especially must be seen “as contacts on various levels between many features of two cultures, two political and social systems . . .”<sup>3</sup> Hence the interest of Gervaise and other contemporary westerners in Asian protocol, for it was precisely in matters of diplomatic form that Asians and Europeans found a large part of their way toward an understanding of each other.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. J. Michael Hayden, Hubert C. Johnson, and the late George A. Rothrock for their helpful suggestions and assistance in writing this article.

<sup>2</sup> Father Nicolas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, John Villiers, trans. and ed. (Bangkok, 1989), pp. 227-29. Wherever possible, I have quoted from English translations of the primary texts of Gervaise, the chevalier de Chaumont, Simon de La Loubère and other witnesses to the events described below, first, to preserve contemporary modes of expression in those translations made in the seventeenth century; and second, to show what is available in English to modern-day researchers and students of this subject.

<sup>3</sup> John E. Wills, Jr., *Embassies & Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666-1687* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 172.

At no time was this interest expressed more extravagantly than in the lavish audience arranged at Versailles on 1 September 1686 by Louis XIV to welcome the three ambassadors of Phra Narai, King of Siam (1656-1688).<sup>4</sup> Held in the newly finished Hall of Mirrors, it was the most spectacular reception the Sun King ever granted to an embassy during his long reign. What made it unique, however, was the way in which Louis and his protocol officers copied as nearly as possible the outward forms of Siamese court ceremonial. Their object was to present the French monarch not as a European prince constrained by fundamental laws and the privileges of corporate bodies, but as an omnipotent Asian despot, equal to Phra Narai in power, wealth, remoteness from his subjects and even personal divinity, to give the Siamese ambassadors an exalted idea of Louis's greatness and magnificence according to eastern expectations. At the same time, the French king impressed his own courtiers — who were sensitive to such symbolism — with a theatrical display of royal absolutism that went so far beyond European precepts that some, such as the marquis d'Argenson, would allude to it when criticizing Louis in later years for having "raised his court on a foundation of Asiatic luxury which he could not sustain."<sup>5</sup>

This episode reveals the Sun King as *roi-machiniste* (to use the term coined by Jean-Marie Apostolidès),<sup>6</sup> skilfully manipulating royal protocol to assert his absolutist claims in a visual way by magnifying his image as French monarch. He did not create the elaborate machinery of ceremonial, something he always regarded as "among those rights of the Crown that cannot be legally alienated" because of its vital role in confirming royal authority and focusing all rule on the person of the sovereign.<sup>7</sup> Rather, by recognizing — if only intuitively — that grandiosity was an important element of "absolutistic" kingship and ceremony was its mode of expression,<sup>8</sup> he adapted Siamese rituals of majesty to the royal French stage to enhance his *gloire* both personally and symbolically as the living embodiment of the state. It was Louis's self-confessed ambition, after all, "to acquire a great reputation," which he desired "more than life itself."<sup>9</sup> Hence, because of the "conscientious way he sought throughout his life and in every act to represent his ideal of the greatness, dignity and glory of the king of France," he exploited all opportunities afforded by his position, such as the Siamese embassy of 1686, to achieve that end. For this reason, one can agree with Norbert Elias's assessment (if

<sup>4</sup>For the most recent study of Franco-Siamese relations in the seventeenth century, see Dirk Van der Cruyse, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris, 1991). Although exhaustively researched and rich in detail, this account is disappointing in that it is a largely a descriptive narrative that adheres to older interpretations of E. W. Hutchinson, Adrien Launay and others, while offering little that is new by way of fresh analysis or explanation.

<sup>5</sup>René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, *Mémoires et journal inédit du marquis d'Argenson*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1857-58) V, pp. 352-53.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1981) *passim*.

<sup>7</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin*, Paul Sonnino, trans. and ed. (New York, 1970), p. 144.

<sup>8</sup>Richard A. Jackson, *Vive le Roi! A History of the French Coronation from Charles V to Charles X* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), p. 213.

<sup>9</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 23

somewhat over-stated) that this is, perhaps, the “decisive condition for what may be called [Louis XIV’s] greatness as a king.”<sup>10</sup>

Ever since 1664, when Jean-Baptiste Colbert chartered the *Compagnie Royale des Indes Orientales* with royal backing, the Bourbon Crown had been seeking ways to establish France as a major power in the Far East, in direct challenge to Dutch hegemony. But when initiatives in the western Indian Ocean failed over the next two decades, French attention shifted to the strategic kingdom of Siam, where Phra Narai — who was eager to make his realm known and recognized abroad<sup>11</sup> — already had taken some tentative steps toward opening diplomatic contacts with the Sun King. Meantime, French policy received added incentive in the form of assurances from the vicars apostolic of the *Missions-Étrangères* (active in Siam since 1662) that the Asian monarch was ready to embrace Christianity, having mistaken his benevolence toward them as a sign of his desire to accept their faith.

Encouraged by these prospects for success, Louis XIV sent an embassy to Southeast Asia in March 1685. Led by the pious chevalier de Chaumont, it failed to achieve its primary goal of converting Phra Narai as anticipated, though two treaties were signed giving extensive privileges to the *Compagnie Royale des Indes Orientales* and protection to native converts to Catholicism. Otherwise, much of the significance of this embassy lay in the fact that the chevalier and other members of his entourage provided the French crown with its first full descriptions of Siamese court ceremonial. These accounts, combined with verbal reports and other written memoranda, were then used by Louis and his advisers to plan the audience held in September 1686 for Phra Narai’s ambassadors, who had returned with Chaumont to France.

Hitherto, the only substantial narrations of Siamese protocol available at Versailles had been written in 1673 by François Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, who had presented letters from Louis XIV and Pope Clement IX to the Asian monarch, thanking him for his generous treatment of the French priests in Siam. In separate dispatches to his superiors in Paris, the Sun King and Colbert, Pallu had described in detail the elaborate etiquette of his audience with Phra Narai,<sup>12</sup> including the

<sup>10</sup>Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, Edmund Jephcott, trans. (New York, 1983), p. 134.

<sup>11</sup>David K. Wyatt, *Thailand, A Short History* (New Haven, CT, 1982), p. 113.

<sup>12</sup>“Ce qui s’est passé en la présentation des Lettres que Sa Saintété, et sa Mté., très chrestienne ont escrit au Roy de Siam portées le 18 Octobre 1673,” Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français nouvelles acquisitions 7491, fols. 247-350; Adrien Launay, ed., *Histoire de la Mission de Siam 1662-1811: Documents historiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1920) I, pp. 43-45; Mgr. Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, to Louis XIV, 8 Nov. 1673; and to Jean-Baptiste Colbert, 8 Nov. 1673, Adrien Launay, ed., *Lettres de Mgr. Pallu*, 2 vols. (Angoulême, 1904-1906) II, pp. 257-58, 258-59 (hereafter cited as Pallu).

compulsory act of the *krâp*<sup>13</sup> (or prostration with the triple salutation of the *wai*)<sup>14</sup> before the king “from which even ambassadors are not exempt.”<sup>15</sup> It appears, however, that the bishop’s descriptions of Siamese protocol went largely unnoticed at Versailles, if for no other reason than the court was preoccupied with the current Dutch war, while relations between the two kingdoms were still very tentative. This began to change in late 1680, however, when news arrived that Phra Narai had sent an embassy to France, inspired (it was said) by reports of Louis XIV’s recent victories over the Dutch, to conclude an alliance with his fellow monarch.<sup>16</sup> In order to prepare the French court to receive the ambassadors with appropriate courtesy, their chaperon, Father Gayme of the Missions-Étrangères, wrote ahead to explain some finer points of Asian etiquette, adding that the three envoys would salute the king *à la mode de Siam*.<sup>17</sup> André Deslândes-Bourreau of the new East India Company and Mgr. Pallu forwarded some additional details.<sup>18</sup> Yet, their efforts were rendered irrelevant when the Siamese embassy perished in a storm off the coast of Madagascar.

Unlike Pallu’s initial reports of 1673, however, it appears that the dispatches sent to France between 1680 and 1682 had been read carefully at Versailles. For in March 1684, when two Siamese mandarins (or nobles) arrived almost unexpectedly at Calais to investigate the fate of their missing countrymen, and to request also that French envoys be sent to Siam to negotiate a treaty of trade and alliance, the recommendations of Pallu, Deslândes-Bourreau, and Gayme were followed to the letter. It is also likely the court was informed of certain practices by Father Bénigne

<sup>13</sup>Jeremy Kemp, *Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century* (Bangkok, 1969), p. 10. This was called variously the act of *sombaye*, *zombaye* and *choca* by contemporary Europeans (see Simon de La Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam [1693]*, David K. Wyatt, ed. (Singapore, 1986), pp. 57-58; Gervaise, pp. 223-24; Father Guy Tachard, S.J., *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam* (London, 1688), pp. 155, 273; Joost Schouten and François Caron, *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam [1671]*, Roger Manley, trans., John Villiers, ed. (Bangkok, 1986), pp. 126-27, all of whom noted that so long as they were in the king’s presence, mandarins, ambassadors and petitioners alike had to remain prostrate.

<sup>14</sup>The *wai* is not just a greeting, it is an action of respect made by bowing the head to meet the thumbs of both hands, palms pressed together and fingers held upward. Originally, the position of the *wai* showed that one’s hands were empty of weapons; so in this respect, it shares a common history with the western handshake, which was initially the clasping of sword hands. The *wai* is far more meaningful, however, because where the handshake is performed between equals, the *wai* is an expression of inequality. In essence, the social inferior — who always initiates the act — places himself at the mercy of his superior, while his lowered eyes and head further reduce his ability to defend himself.

<sup>15</sup>Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français nouvelles acquisitions 9376, fol.104v.; “Ce qui s’est passé en la présentation des Lettres . . .,” BN. FF. n.a. 7491, fol. 247; Launay, *Documents*, II, p. 257. See also E.W. Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1940), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup>Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français 5623, fol. 36v.; Sainctot, “Arrivée de trois Mandarins de Siam en 1684,” BN. FF. 14118, fols. 127, 129v-130; Kōsa Pān to the marquis de Seignelay, September 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 195; Father Claude de Bèze, S.J., 1688: *Revolution in Siam*, E.W. Hutchinson, trans. and ed. (Hong Kong, 1968), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup>Père Gayme to the directors of the seminary of the Missions-Étrangères in Paris, 18 Nov. 1680 and 18 Jan. 1681, Launay, *Documents*, I, pp. 109, 112.

<sup>18</sup>For Deslândes-Bourreau’s report, dated 1680, see BN. FF. nouvelles acquisitions 9380, fol. 84; and Lotika Varadarajan, trans. and ed., *India in the 17th Century: Memoirs of François Martin (1670-1694)*, 3 vols. (New Delhi, 1983) II, pp. 709-10. See also François Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, to Jean-Baptiste Colbert of 15 Nov. 1682, in Launay, *Documents*, I, pp. 105, 116; Pallu, II, pp. 307-8.

Vachet of the Missions-Étrangères, who had accompanied the mandarins to France by request of Phra Narai not only as their interpreter, but as his special messenger.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, despite efforts to emulate some of the mechanics of Asian diplomacy, it is clear from subsequent events that the French court lacked sufficient background to comprehend the deep cultural implications of Siamese protocol for the unparalleled position of Asian despotism, or its subtle reflection of social divisions. As a result, misunderstandings developed almost immediately between the visiting envoys and their European hosts. The mandarins were shocked, for example, by the apparent lack of reverence shown to Louis XIV. Accustomed "to the profound respect and great silence that one keeps in the presence of their king," they were "extraordinarily surprised to hear a confused murmuring [from the attendant crowd of courtiers], and to see how everyone pushed forward to draw nearer to the person of the prince . . ." <sup>20</sup> To the Bourbon king, the numbers of those who sought to approach him was an indication of both the range of his power and the dependence of his courtiers on his favour; hence, he always "liked and desired this congestion of people," as "it . . . glorified his existence."<sup>21</sup> This, however, cannot have left a good impression on the two envoys, whose own monarch was so revered by his subjects that they were not permitted even to gaze at him, let alone pronounce his name.<sup>22</sup> But Louis XIV found himself equally bemused when the mandarins prostrated themselves before him. Asking if they would like to stand, the astonished monarch had to be told that they would remain prone so long as they were in his presence.<sup>23</sup>

Nor did their understanding of each other improve with time. For example, when the Siamese were taken to a command performance of the opera *Roland* a few days later,<sup>24</sup> a fiasco developed over their seating.<sup>25</sup> While the two envoys "did not

<sup>19</sup>Sainctot, "Arrivée de trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fols. 127-127v, 129; Mgr. Laneau to the directors of the Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères, c. 4 and 7 Jan. 1684, Launay, *Documents*, I, pp. 125-26, 126; "Ordres du roi de Siam pour MM. Vachet et Pascot pour les envoyés," 14 January 1684, Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 129; Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 127; Hutchinson, *Adventurers*, p. 93; Adrien Launay, *Histoire de la mission de Siam 1662-1811*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1920) I, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Vachet, p. 142. See also BN. FF. n.a. 9376, fol. 10v.

<sup>21</sup>Elias, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup>Mgr. Lambert de La Motte, bishop of Bérèthe, to the directors of the Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères in Paris, 3 Dec. 1673, Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 51; Gervaise, pp. 215, 223; Alexandre de Chaumont, *A Relation of the late Embassy of Monsr. de Chaumont, Knt. to the Court of the King of Siam* (London, 1687), p. 27; Tachard, p. 273; La Loubère, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup>Sainctot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 133; Vachet, p. 143. See also Philippe de Courcillon, marquis de Dangeau, *Journal*, M.M. Soulié, ed., 16 vols. (Paris, 1854-1860) I, p. 75; M. Turpin, *Histoire civil et naturelle du royaume de Siam*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1771) II, p. 80.

<sup>24</sup>The subject of this opera was suggested by Louis XIV to his chief composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully. The libretto portrayed the king as "the heroic defender of the nation's security against evil warmongers." (Robert M. Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1973), p. 235. For the musical entertainments performed for the subsequent Siamese embassy of 1686, see *ibid.*, pp. 303-5.

<sup>25</sup>In describing of this incident and others like it, Van der Cruyssen offers no corresponding analysis of Siamese cultural patterns to account for the mandarins' actions, or any explanation for the inability of the French to accommodate to their practices. He thus passes over this event as a "cultural incident" that "illustrates the difficulty of relations between two worlds conditioned by fundamentally different cultural codes" (pp. 276-77), without demonstrating what these fundamental differences were.

know that the chairs on the lower level," reserved for them by special order of Louis XIV just opposite his own, "were more noble and convenient" by European standards,<sup>26</sup> the French were equally ignorant that according to Siamese social organization, differences in rank between individuals were reinforced by a corresponding spatial separation both in height and distance.<sup>27</sup> This was especially important for the monarch, who sat always on an elevated throne at a high window overlooking those to whom he gave audience, while these people — by means of the *krāp* — were reduced to the lowest possible level.

Such separations existed in French society, too, especially at Versailles where an intricate code of conduct regulated social activity and determined, above all, one's accessibility to the king. From Louis's minutely orchestrated *levée* in the morning to his equally ceremonial *couchée* at night, an elaborate protocol established with precision the hierarchical relationships among the monarch, his family members, his chief ministers and the multitude of nobles who inhabited his court. Indeed, not only did this etiquette determine such matters as who was permitted into Louis's presence at certain hours of the day, when petitions could be presented for his consideration, and what kind of posture or distance one assumed when attending him in person. It extended also to the physical setting of the palace itself, where private and public rooms were designated clearly, as well as those who could enter these apartments and under what restrictions. In short, in France, as in Siam, the separations of space and distance that were built into the protocol of daily court life served a vital function "in the structure of that society and its form of government," which the king used effectively "to distribute distinctions, favours or proofs of [his] displeasure."<sup>28</sup> But that function was chiefly *symbolic*.

In Siam, on the other hand, the importance of such spatial separations, particularly in terms of height, for which there was no real equivalent in France, had even greater meaning. This was because of the profound *cultural*, even religious significance of keeping the top of one's head — where the *khwan* (that is, "spirit essence" or, loosely, the soul) resided — higher than that of one's social inferiors.<sup>29</sup> It was here that the mandarins and their Gallic hosts had no comprehension of each other. Consequently, when the two Asians tried to place themselves further up the bleachers at the opera "so that no one could sit over their head," their French attendants misunderstood their intention and attempted to reseat them in accordance with the king's express commands. Thinking themselves gravely offended by this unfortunate *faux pas*, the mandarins stormed out of the theatre before Louis himself could arrive, declining ever again to expose themselves to such treatment.<sup>30</sup> Infuriated, the French king vowed to punish those responsible for the incident, while his brother, the duc d'Orléans, and Father Vachet discussed ways of avoiding such

<sup>26</sup>Vachet, p. 144.

<sup>27</sup>Kemp, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>Elias, pp. 84-85.

<sup>29</sup>Kemp, p. 10; La Loubère, p. 55. The *Kwan* may be defined as "one's vital spirit which gives strength and health to the individual owner" (quoted in Kemp, 49). Hence, observed La Loubère in 1693: "As the most eminent place is always amongst them the most honourable, the head, as the highest part of the body, is also the most respected. To touch any person on the head or the hair, or to stroke ones hand over the head, is to offer him the greatest of all affronts . . . (p. 57)."

<sup>30</sup>BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179.

embarrassments in future.<sup>31</sup> But soon afterward, the French felt insulted in their turn when the two Asians refused to genuflect at the elevation of the host during a mass celebrated for the opening of the parlement of Paris,<sup>32</sup> as it did not fit their cultural patterns.

Perhaps the major contributor to this problem of mutual misunderstanding was the simple fact that the mandarins lacked ambassadorial status, because Phra Narai would not send a new embassy to France until the fate of the first one had been discovered. As a result of this technicality, the deeper implications of Siamese protocol never were addressed at Versailles; for without official standing the two envoys were not entitled to the kind of consideration ambassadors of foreign monarchs generally received. Furthermore, because they were as ignorant of the language and customs of France as the French were of almost anything Siamese, it was very difficult for either party to overcome the ill-effects of their culture shock. Nor did it help matters that Father Vachet treated his wards with scant regard, even handling the official business of the mission without their participation.<sup>33</sup> Thus reduced to mere objects of curiosity to the French court,<sup>34</sup> the two men increasingly avoided their hosts, whose every misstep of protocol they viewed as a personal affront. Meanwhile, the French dismissed their guests' inexplicable behaviour as mere "boorishness."<sup>35</sup>

How different was the treatment given the third Siamese embassy to France two years later; for in the meantime, Louis XIV had sent his own ambassadors to Phra Narai. On their return to Europe in spring 1686, they brought with them not only three new envoys from the Asian monarch, but also detailed accounts of Siamese court ceremonial that were used by the French king and his ministers to prepare for the mandarins' first audience with Louis on the following 1 September. What had convinced the king and his council to open direct contact with Phra Narai were the Missions-Étrangères' over-confident assurances that the Siamese monarch was on the verge of embracing Catholicism, and that all he needed to take the decisive step was a personal appeal from Louis XIV. Then, they had alleged, the Siamese "people would follow his example and perhaps [even] the neighbouring kings" who were his tributaries.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Vachet, pp. 144-45.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 147. The same thing happened when the two envoys attended another mass, celebrated by the archbishop of Paris.

<sup>33</sup>From all reports, the two mandarins believed that they were being used by Father Vachet for his own ends. (See, for example, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 179.) But according to Saintot, the French priest denied having such authority over the Siamese envoys, complaining in his turn that they were stubborn and difficult to deal with. (Saintot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 129.)

<sup>34</sup>Turpin, II, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup>See Vachet, pp. 140-43. Every modern account of the second Siamese legation repeats Vachet's criticisms without attempting to understand the problem from the envoys' point of view.

<sup>36</sup>Saintot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134; Father Bénigne Vachet, "Mémoire pour être présenté à MM. les ministres d'État de France, sur toutes les choses qui regardent les envoyés du Roi de Siam, 1685," Launay, *Documents*, I, pp. 154-55; BN. FF. 5623, fol. 37. See also André Deslandes-Bourreau, *Histoire de M. Constance, Premier Ministre du Roi de Siam* (Amsterdam, 1756), pp. 18-19; comte Claude de Forbin, *Mémoires du comte de Forbin*, in F. Michaud and Poujoulat, eds., *Nouvelle collection des mémoires relative à l'histoire de France*, vol. XXXIII (Paris, 1854), p. 469; J.C. Gatty, ed., *Voiege de Siam du Père Bouvet* (Leiden, 1963), p. 7; Martin, II,



Ever since 1667, the conversion of Phra Narai had been the primary goal of the vicars apostolic in Siam, where the king's extraordinary generosity toward their mission seemed to indicate a receptiveness to Catholicism that could be nurtured for the greater glory of the Christian God and their own royal patron. To that end, they had lobbied over several years for Louis XIV "to send an ambassador to this court . . . [to] convince this monarch to embrace our religion as being of supreme authority,"<sup>37</sup> in the sincere belief that Phra Narai was close to conversion. Although that outcome would have been nothing short of miraculous, it was not an unreasonable leap of faith for such pious men to expect that, in reward for their charity and missionary zeal, God would aid them in their quest, just as He had intervened with Clovis and Constantine "the Great."<sup>38</sup> Nor was it any less reasonable for the king of France also to believe in the possibility of converting Phra Narai. After all, he had advised the dauphin, "the infinite variety of religions [in the world] may be distressing," but they all shared so many principles "that their very diversity obviously establishes a single religion, of which all others are imperfect or false copies . . ." In that case, he asked rhetorically, "what other religion can prevail over ours, to which all the able and enlightened people in the world have submitted when it has appeared . . . ?"<sup>39</sup>

Yet, the priests also counted on the efficacy of the Sun King's personal influence with the Siamese monarch, in the apparent belief that there existed an intimacy of understanding among princes, based upon common concerns, experiences, and perceptions of their place in the world, which transcended cultural differences. This extended, as well, to their sacred role as guardians of their respective faiths, which the missionaries deliberately exploited by invoking religion (and specifically the Catholic religion) as the chief element in preserving popular obedience to the crown, French or Siamese, and its prosperity<sup>40</sup> — an invocation certain to impress Louis XIV, who once had observed: "No maxim is more established by Christianity than this humble submission of subjects to those who are instituted over them."<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, therefore, a personal entreaty to convert from the Sun King to his Asian counterpart could have enormous effect, because he could speak *en roi* as a powerful Christian prince to a brother monarch. As for their concurrent claim that Phra Narai's subjects would emulate his conversion, the mere fact that he would not grant his people official permission to embrace the foreign faith lest they mistook this as an express order to convert,<sup>42</sup> suggests that the vicars apostolic were far less naïve in their cross-cultural perceptions than at first might appear. As a final inducement, the priests held out the double lure of challenging Dutch hegemony in the Far East and of establishing French trade

pp. 992-93; Launay, *Mission de Siam*, I, p. 59; Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand* (London, 1960), pp. 61-62.

<sup>37</sup>Pierre Lambert de la Motte, bishop of Bérythe, to François Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, 19 Oct. 1667, Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup>Launay, I, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup>Pierre Lambert de la Motte, bishop of Bérythe, to François Pallu, bishop of Héliopolis, 19 Oct. 1667, Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 103.

<sup>41</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 245.

<sup>42</sup>BN. FF. n.a. 9376, fol. 108.

securely by means of a political and commercial alliance with Siam, knowing that this appealed to Louis XIV's expansionist ambitions.<sup>43</sup>

Thus inspired chiefly (it was claimed) by visions of the "glory that would accrue to [him], and the merit before God, for having undertaken so noble a task,"<sup>44</sup> the Sun King appointed the pious chevalier de Chaumont as his ambassador to Siam in December 1684.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the abbé de Choisy was named coadjutor in the event of Chaumont's untimely death on the outward voyage, with specific instructions to remain in Siam to baptise Phra Narai should he agree to convert.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the ambassador was provided with a suite of seventy-six retainers "to increase the majesty of his embassy," and a cargo of rich presents (valued at more than 300,000 *écus*) for the Siamese monarch in accordance with Asian diplomatic custom.<sup>47</sup>

After a voyage lasting half a year, Chaumont's tiny squadron of two frigates (*L'Oiseau* and *La Maligne*) reached Siam on 23 September 1685.<sup>48</sup> Immediately, Phra Narai ordered preparations to receive Louis XIV's chief ambassador with extraordinary honours. By all accounts, the Siamese monarch planned to entertain the chevalier magnificently, giving orders to set aside the usual "Ceremonies and

<sup>43</sup>Father Bénigne Vachet, "Mémoire pour être présenté . . .," Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 155; Forbin, p. 469; Launay, *Mission de Siam*, I, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup>Father Bénigne Vachet, "Mémoire pour être présenté . . .," Launay, *Documents*, I, p. 155. This was the primary motive attributed to Louis by most contemporary observers, such as Deslandes-Bourreau (p. 19), Forbin (p. 469) and Claude de l'Isle (*Relation historique du royaume de Siam* (Paris, 1684) introduction, n.p.). Victor-L. Tapié argues, on the other hand, that Louis XIV saw himself as the protector of Catholicism at home and abroad in the 1680s because of political reasons, rather than from any real "spiritual and religious sentiment." (Victor-L. Tapié, "Louis XIV's Methods in Foreign Policy," in Ragnhild Hatton, ed., *Louis XIV and Europe* [London, 1976], pp. 8-9.) Whatever the case, these years represented that period in his life and reign when Louis began wrestling with his own religiosity, while moving rapidly against the Huguenots and other religious dissidents in his realm.

<sup>45</sup>BN. FF. 20979, fol. 7. See also: "Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont ambassadeur près du Roi de Siam, 21 janvier 1685," Archives Nationales B<sup>2</sup> 52, fol. 46; "Ordre du Roi pourtant que le Chevalier de Chaumont commanda le sieur de Vaudricourt dans la route de Siam, et part tout ailleurs, 21 janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fol. 50v; Dangeau, I, p. 69; Forbin, p. 469; Saintot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134.

<sup>46</sup>"Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont . . . janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fols. 49v-50; "Lettre de créance au Roy de Siam pour le sieur abbé de Choisy, 21 janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fols. 52-52v; Saintot, "Arrivée des trois mandarins . . . 1684," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134; abbé François Timoléon de Choisy, *Mémoires de l'abbé de Choisy: Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1799), p. 143; Dangeau, I, p. 86; Forbin, p. 469; Martin, II, p. 995.

<sup>47</sup>Forbin, p. 469; "Instruction pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont . . . janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fol. 46; "Mémoire des personnes qui seront embarquées sur le vaisseau L'Oyseau outre l'équipage ordinaire," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fols. 55-55v. For an inventory of the gifts, see: "Passeport pour les présents que le Roy envoie au Roi de Siam, 23 janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fols. 53-53v; Dangeau, I, pp. 115-16; Gervaise, p. 147.

<sup>48</sup>The French squadron had set sail for Southeast Asia early the previous March. For modern, though largely descriptive narratives of Chaumont's embassy in 1686, see: Wyatt, pp. 113-14; Hutchinson, *Adventurers*, pp. 101-15; W.A.R. Wood, *A History of Siam from the Earliest Times to the Year A.D. 1781* (Bangkok, 1924), pp. 204-6; Rong Syamananda, *A History of Thailand* (Bangkok, 1988), pp. 78-79; M.L. Manich Jumsai, *The Story of King Narai and His Ambassador to France in 1686*, *Kosaparn* (Bangkok, 1987), pp. 74-75, 77-82; Van der Cruysee, pp. 335-69; Raphaël Vongsuravathana, *Un jésuite à la cour de Siam* (Paris, 1992), pp. 48-66; Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. III, bk. 3 (Chicago, 1993), pp. 1191-96.

Customs that were observed in the reception of other Ambassadors.”<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, on 29 September he was greeted aboard ship *à la Siamoise* by two mandarins with an impressive retinue of forty men, sent expressly by Phra Narai to congratulate the French envoy on his arrival.<sup>50</sup> Arrangements also were begun for the ambassador’s ascent by slow stages up Siam’s chief river, the Menam Chao Phraya, to the royal capital of Ayutthaya. Specifically, rest-houses were built at fifteen-mile intervals along the river’s banks, where Chaumont and his suite were to stop for meals or pass the night. Each place was staffed by two *opras* or *oyas* (translated usually as marshals, dukes, or peers), seven officers of Phra Narai’s household and a body of Siamese troops who patrolled constantly to prevent “noise and disorder.” Dinner was served every day in European style for at least thirty guests.<sup>51</sup> As a special mark of distinction, the rest-houses were painted red to indicate that the ambassador was to “be treated as [the king of Siam’s] own person, there being only the Royal Houses of that colour.”<sup>52</sup> Finally, a large residence was built a league or two down river from Ayutthaya, where the whole party was to lodge until Chaumont’s first audience with the king.<sup>53</sup> After that, the ambassador and his retinue would be moved into the city for the remainder of their stay.

Thus even before 8 October, when the French began their stately river journey, an elaborate protocol was observed that deliberately surpassed in splendour the ceremonial customarily used in Siam. As many as sixty-six royal *balons* (or richly decorated gondolas) awaited Chaumont and his party at the mouth of the Menam Chao Phraya, where a particularly splendid vessel was reserved for the ambassador and Choisy.<sup>54</sup> “A Portuguese whom the King [of Siam] had made General of the Troops in Bangkok” (probably a mestizo) also attended Chaumont as a special courtesy “[to] give orders for all things.”<sup>55</sup> Four ornate craft were appointed, as well, to carry the various members of the French entourage, while in two columns on either side of the chevalier’s *balon* the gondolas of twelve court mandarins served as an escort. Upon entering the river, the flotilla was joined by the chief nobles of the district and, next day, by the governors of Bangkok and Petchaburi with their respective retinues.<sup>56</sup> As an additional honour, the chevalier was saluted with artillery everywhere he passed, “which never was done to any other ambassador,”<sup>57</sup> while at each rest stop he was greeted by local dignitaries. These mandarins then

<sup>49</sup>Tachard, p. 139. See also Choisy, pp. 135, 144.

<sup>50</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 20; Choisy, p. 133; Bouvet, pp. 94-95; Tachard, pp. 138-40, 142; Forbin, pp. 474-75.

<sup>51</sup>Tachard, pp. 140, 153; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy* . . . , p. 24; Choisy, pp. 135, 139; marquis de Sourches, *Mémoires*, comte de Cosnac and Arthur Bertrand, eds., vols. I and II (Paris, 1882) I, p. 404. Tachard put the number of place-settings at sixty for each meal. (Tachard, p. 152.)

<sup>52</sup>Choisy, p. 140; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup>Tachard, p. 140; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 26; Choisy, pp. 135, 136, 143; Sourches, I, p. 405.

<sup>54</sup>This *balon* was described as being “all over gilt, threescore and twelve feet long, and rowed by seventy handsome men, with Oars covered in Plates of Silver,” Tachard, p. 149; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 23; Choisy, p. 138. See also Bouvet, p. 116.

<sup>55</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 28. See also Choisy, p. 140; Sourches, I, p. 405.

<sup>56</sup>Choisy, p. 139; Tachard, p. 153; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 24; Sourches, I, p. 405.

<sup>57</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 34.

joined his cortège until, by 13 October when the flotilla reached the outskirts of Ayutthaya, it numbered well over 150 *balons*.

No sooner had they arrived at the capital, however, than a “tedious dispute” erupted between the French ambassador and his Asian hosts over the ceremonial to be observed at his forthcoming audience with Phra Narai, scheduled for 18 October.<sup>58</sup> To prepare for the event, Chaumont had asked for instruction in Siamese protocol, “the manner wherewith they are want to receive Ambassadors . . . being very different from that of France.”<sup>59</sup> Notwithstanding, the chevalier found native custom so demeaning “to the greatness of the Monarch by whom I was sent” that he refused to observe it. His objection was not the result, however, of simple *hauteur* or contempt for a non-western culture. It arose instead from his growing awareness of Siamese court ritual, the significance that lay behind it, and his own duty as ambassador to uphold the reputation of Louis XIV.<sup>60</sup>

What Chaumont clearly understood, but refused to concede, was that the ritual presentation of royal letters from a foreign prince to the Thai monarch — the essential purpose of the first audience in Siam — was an act of homage or tribute by an inferior.<sup>61</sup> Hence the deep “prejudice” encountered a few months earlier by agents of the Compagnie Royale des Indes Orientales, who had argued heatedly with Siamese officials “that a distinction in terms” of status between Phra Narai and Louis XIV (whom the mandarins regarded as subordinate) “could not be affected only in accordance with their wishes,” and “that both Kings could be accorded equal status.”<sup>62</sup> On the basis of Siamese diplomatic practice, however, this assertion was unreasonable. In their eyes, the French monarch had already humbled himself before Phra Narai, and admitted his inferiority, too, whether consciously or not, by being the first to send a letter of friendship that the fathers of the Missions-Étrangères had presented on his behalf in 1673. Yet, it should be noted here that the differentiation between dominant powers and client kingdoms that prevailed throughout the Far East was not completely alien to French thinking. For evidence of this, one has only to recall the example of Louis XIV himself, who, having forced the Spanish crown to concede the right of precedence in 1661 to his ambassador in Rome, had boasted triumphantly: “Here the kind of homage is of another sort, of king to king, of crown

<sup>58</sup>Choisy, p. 147.

<sup>59</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 29. In fact, Chaumont had been explicitly ordered by Louis XIV to contact the French missionaries upon arrival in Siam to learn how he would be received by the Siamese. (“Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont janvier 1658,” Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fol. 47v.)

<sup>60</sup>Van der Cruysse offers no explanation for Chaumont's refusal to conform to Siamese protocol, observing only that he wanted to present his credentials and Louis's letter to the Asian king “as this was practised in European courts” (p. 346). Although Van der Cruysse quotes from Forbin to explain the symbolic relation between protocol and the image of the monarch in Siam, he fails to attribute to Chaumont and his conduct a similar awareness of the role ritual played in buttressing the image of European sovereigns. This misrepresents Chaumont — if only by implication — as a proud and petty chauvinist.

<sup>61</sup>For Chaumont's description of the imperious nature of the protocol observed in audiences at Siam, see his *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 113-17. See also Gervaise, pp. 227-29. As Simon de La Loubère later noted: “All Oriental Princes do esteem it a great Honour to receive Embassies, and to send the fewest they can . . . (ibid., p. 110).”

<sup>62</sup>Martin, II, pp. 942-43.

to crown, which could not even leave our enemies in any more doubt that ours is the first [monarchy] in all Christendom."<sup>63</sup> It is significant that the youthful Louis interpreted his political victory over Spain in a way that went far beyond chivalric definitions of fealty and ties of vassalage that still had meaning in his day. Thus, that Chaumont so quickly perceived and objected to the inferior position in which the Bourbon monarch was placed by Siamese protocol, indicates a mutual understanding between the French and their Asian hosts on the level, at least, of the royal game of one-upmanship that they both played, however sensitive to other aspects of native culture the envoy might or might not have been.

By extension, therefore, Chaumont also refused the marginal role assigned to him by Siamese ceremonial, which paid no deference to envoys in the European sense, since an "Ambassador throughout the East is [regarded as] no other than a King's Messenger: he represents not his master."<sup>64</sup> By contrast, "the Letters of Credence of which he is Bearer" were accorded "the same honours as [the Siamese] would give to the princes who have written them; [as] if they themselves were present." Such documents were "looked upon as the Royal Word," an extension of the monarch's own person that came directly from his own hand and contained his own thoughts.<sup>65</sup> The physical character of the letter further symbolized this perception: those sent by Phra Narai to his fellow rulers, including Louis XIV, were inscribed in red ink on sheets of gold "as thin as a Leaf of Paper." They then were wrapped in layers of silk and enshrined in a set of finely wrought caskets of precious metals and lacquered wood for safe transport.<sup>66</sup>

Thus for a variety of reasons, from French pride and personal dignity to official duty and perhaps even chagrin that Louis XIV had not achieved the final word in regal magnificence, Chaumont made it abundantly clear to his hosts that he "would bate nothing of the mode of receiving Ambassadors in *France*, which at length [was] granted me."<sup>67</sup> This was, after all, the only means at his disposal to uphold the reputation and prestige of the Sun King in complete equality with Phra Narai, his principal responsibility as French ambassador. To have behaved otherwise would have dishonoured both him and his royal master.

But Phra Narai was sensitive to foreign practices in any case, even if the concessions he granted to Chaumont potentially demeaned his own dignity. Certainly he was more sensitive than some members of the French embassy, who thought customs such as the *krāp* so ridiculous that they laughed aloud at the first sight of serried ranks of mandarins performing it before their monarch, "with their

<sup>63</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup>La Loubère, p. 108.

<sup>65</sup>Gervaise, p. 228; Tachard, p. 164.

<sup>66</sup>La Loubère, p. 70. See also the description of the letter sent by Phra Narai to Louis XIV in 1686, and its elaborate casings, left by the sieur de Saintot. ("Reception faite aux ambassadeurs de Siam in 1686," BN. FF. 14118, fol. 134.)

<sup>67</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 29. See also Choisy, pp. 144-45; Tachard, p. 158. Ironically, Chaumont here exceeded his orders, which had instructed him only to salute the Asian monarch "in the French fashion," and to obtain permission to remain seated on cushions on the floor for the duration of the audience. ("Instructions pour le sieur chevalier de Chaumont . . . janvier 1685," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 52, fol. 48.)

beehive [that is, conical] hats pointed up each other's ass."<sup>68</sup> Yet, the Asian monarch was very eager to accommodate his prospective European allies for political reasons, as well, despite protests from many of his court nobles over the unprecedented treatment of Chaumont.<sup>69</sup> Apart from the prospect that relations with France offered for the increase of his wealth through trade, which he "desires very much" seeing that commerce in his realm was a royal monopoly,<sup>70</sup> the Siamese monarch was no doubt flattered by the advances of a western king who sought his friendship. This only increased his prestige and reputation. Phra Narai's most important motive, however, was his well-known antipathy to their mutual foe, the Dutch, and his growing anxiety over the latter's "some time uniting with his enemies and attacking him."<sup>71</sup> In that event, a French alliance would give him an effective counterpoise. Hence the king's explicit orders to his chief officials to spare "nothing that might contribute to the dignity of [Chaumont's] reception" at court,<sup>72</sup> for he was determined to win French favour.

Thanks largely to Phra Narai's political needs and flexibility, therefore, the two parties quickly resolved at least the lesser details of protocol to be observed on 18 October. It was agreed, for instance, that Chaumont would wear his shoes, stockings, and sword during the audience, contrary to custom; that he would make his reverence in the European fashion, without the ritual prostration generally required of envoys; and that he would begin his compliments standing instead of sitting on a carpet, though he had to continue his address seated on a low stool, but wearing his hat. Far more difficult to settle, however, was the very sensitive issue of the manner in which Louis XIV's letter was to be presented. For the chevalier insisted on handing this directly to Phra Narai as in Europe, a "pretension that clashed absolutely with the practices of the kings of Siam" and their concepts of monarchical dignity.<sup>73</sup>

Only after three days of intense negotiation did the two sides finally reach a compromise on this issue, the abbé de Choisy having convinced his stubborn superior at last that "the customs of these countries are so different from ours that at each moment it was necessary to pause."<sup>74</sup> Chaumont would be permitted to present the Sun King's letter to Phra Narai after all, but not hand to hand as he had insisted originally. Instead, the royal brief was to be placed according to Siamese custom on a golden saucer affixed to a long wand also of gold, which the French envoy was to carry to the audience. In return for his co-operation, it was agreed that

<sup>68</sup>Forbin, p. 476.

<sup>69</sup>Choisy, p. 144.

<sup>70</sup>An anonymous missionary to François Martin, Pondichéry, 14 Dec. 1675, BN. FF. n.a. 7485, fol. 35v.

<sup>71</sup>Council of Batavia to the Heeren VII, Amsterdam, 19 Jan. 1655, Vajirana National Library, *Records of Relations between Siam and Foreign Countries in the Seventeenth Century*, 5 vols. (Bangkok, 1915-1916), II, p. 16.

<sup>72</sup>Quoted by Gervaise, p. 229.

<sup>73</sup>Forbin, p. 475. To be fair, however, Chaumont was not entirely in the wrong here. As La Loubère later pointed out, Phra Narai had sent word to the envoy that if any of the court protocol did not suit him, the king would change it (p. 58).

<sup>74</sup>Choisy, p. 149. To break the deadlock, the abbé finally convinced Chaumont that they "must accommodate [themselves] to the customs of the Orient in matters that were far from dishonourable," adding that "one could not render too great respect to the king's letter . . . (p. 147)."

three small steps would be placed beneath the elevated throne window in the great hall of the palace complex at which the Siamese king always appeared for official events, to permit Chaumont to mount just under the base of the dais. Then gripping the bottom of the wand, he would lift the saucer just over his head by slightly extending his elbow, at which point Phra Narai would take Louis XIV's letter without having to reach down or stoop to accept it.<sup>75</sup> The advantage of this arrangement was twofold: it allowed the chevalier to present the royal brief almost directly to the Asian monarch as he had wanted, thus satisfying his European sense of dignity, while it preserved the outward forms of Siamese court ceremonial. So although it appears on the surface that the Asian monarch had bested his French guests in their dispute over protocol and sent them scrambling to accommodate to his customs, in fact both sides had found their way to a satisfactory compromise that upheld their respective codes of honour, without denigrating either.

Everything was now in readiness for the audience, and at 7 a.m. on 18 October forty mandarins, led by two *oyas*, arrived at the sumptuous lodgings of the French ambassador to escort him by water to Ayutthaya. Altogether, over two hundred ornate craft made up the flotilla, which was saluted at Ayutthaya with artillery. Disembarking at the Siamese capital, Chaumont and his suite marched in procession to the palace gates, preceded by richly caparisoned elephants and a host of finely clad mandarins to the sound of trumpets, drums, pipes, bells, and horns. Lining their route were double files of armed soldiers, uniformly dressed in gilt metal helmets, red tunics and the customary *panung* (or swadling loincloth). On entering the palace complex, the French embassy proceeded through a succession of five large courtyards between ranks of royal guards also clothed in red. It is one of many interesting parallels that at Ayutthaya, as at Versailles, a single quadrangle was "not enough to express the dignity and rank of the king";<sup>76</sup> several were used for that purpose. Finally reaching the innermost courtyard, Chaumont and his suite found "a great number of *Mandarins* . . . prostrate on the ground," along with two hundred soldiers of Phra Narai's lifeguard clad in royal red like the other troops, whom the first Portuguese visitors to Siam had dubbed the "Red-Arms" because of the scarlet hue of their tattooed forearms.<sup>77</sup>

At this point, the ambassador paused at the foot of the staircase leading up to the audience hall to permit his retinue to enter first, just before Phra Narai appeared at his elevated dais. Inside, they took their position behind the low seat reserved for Chaumont, between rows of high-ranking mandarins who knelt on either hand. Sitting cross-legged on Persian carpets, the Europeans were to reverence the Siamese king *à la Française* without standing up. The audience chamber itself was rectangular in shape, richly carpeted and exquisitely painted "with flowers of Gold from the top to the bottom." At the far end was the curtained throne window, raised nine feet from the floor and flanked on either side by multi-tiered, ceremonial parasols (called *suppathon*) made of cloth of gold, which were additional emblems

<sup>75</sup>Forbin, p. 475; Choisy, p. 147; Tachard, pp. 159-60. See also La Loubère, pp. 57, 58, 99.

<sup>76</sup>Elias, p. 81.

<sup>77</sup>For descriptions of the embarkation and procession, see: Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 31-34; Choisy, pp. 149-51; Tachard, pp. 160-66; Bouvet, pp. 116-18; Forbin, pp. 475-76; Sourches, I, pp. 406-8. Forbin thought the arms of these guards looked more blue than red (p. 476).

of Siamese monarchy.<sup>78</sup> When everything was ready, “a great noise of trumpets and drums was heard” to signal the arrival of Phra Narai himself, at which point the assembled mandarins immediately performed the *krāp* to the boorish amusement of their European guests.<sup>79</sup>

Parting the curtains of his throne window, the king appeared, towering above his court in near-fabulous Asian splendour. On his head he wore a conical tiara “all shining with precious Stones,” while his fingers sparkled with clusters of diamond rings. His underclothing was the colour “of fire and gold,” similarly studded with diamonds, over which he wore a robe also of cloth of gold that used still larger gems for buttons. “All of these Ornaments,” recalled one observer, “together with a brisk Air, full of Life, and always smiling, made him look with a great deal of Gracefulness and Majesty.”<sup>80</sup> Alerted by the ceremonial fanfare that Phra Narai had appeared, Chaumont too entered the hall, followed by the abbé de Choisy, who bore Louis XIV’s letter on its golden saucer.

Advancing four paces “and looking [directly] upon the King,” Chaumont made a profound reverence, which he repeated a second time in the centre of the chamber and a third time when he had reached his appointed seat, thus performing an amended form of the *wai* (as opposed to the customary *krāp*) in accordance with Siamese protocol. Phra Narai “answered every Bow he made by an Inclination of Body, which he accompanied with a serene and smiling Countenance.”<sup>81</sup> The ambassador then began his address to the king. At the second word he covered his head and took his seat as pre-arranged, only raising his hat when he spoke of the two monarchs.<sup>82</sup> So far, everything had unfolded according to plan. After the translation of Chaumont’s address, however, a potentially disastrous diplomatic scene was averted narrowly when the ambassador presented Louis XIV’s letter to Phra Narai.

The problem was that the three risers that should have been placed beneath the throne window were missing, probably by design to humble the surprised ambassador, who presumably would have had to hold the wand of the golden saucer at its base and raise his arm very high if the Sun King’s missive were to reach the level of Phra Narai.<sup>83</sup> Thinking, however, “that that Distance suited not with his Dignity,” the chevalier advanced boldly toward the royal dais, holding the wand just under the saucer and, without raising his arm or extending his elbow, he offered

<sup>78</sup>According to Quaritch Wales, the *suppathon* is mentioned in the Pauranic literature of India as one of the essential symbols of kingship, while elsewhere in Southeast Asia it is regarded as part of the regalia of Buddha in the Tusita Heaven. The *suppathon* thus is one of the pre-eminent trappings of authority. (*Siamese State Ceremonies* [London, 1931], pp. 93-94.)

<sup>79</sup>See Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy* . . . , pp. 35-36, 43; Tachard, p. 167; Forbin, p. 476; Choisy, p. 152; Bouvet, pp. 118-19; Sourches, I, pp. 408, 412.

<sup>80</sup>Tachard, p. 168. For similar descriptions, see also: Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 41-42; Forbin, p. 476; Sourches, I, p. 411; l’Isle, p. 128; Gervaise, p. 215.

<sup>81</sup>Tachard, p. 168. See also Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 36; Choisy, p. 153; Bouvet, p. 119; Forbin, p. 476; Sourches, I, p. 409.

<sup>82</sup>For the delivery of Chaumont’s speech, see Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 36, 39-40; Choisy, pp. 153-54, 159; Tachard, p. 168.

<sup>83</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 56; Choisy, p. 154; Tachard, p. 171; Sourches, I, p. 411. In fact, after the audience Chaumont complained about this breach of promise. When told that the mandarins despaired of ever displeasing their monarch, the ambassador retorted coolly: “I . . . was even more embarrassed: you have only one King to please, and I have two!” (Quoted in Choisy, p. 157.)



Louis's letter to Phra Narai as if they had been standing on the same level. This obliged the Siamese monarch to stoop down "in such a manner as one might see his whole Body" to take up the brief.<sup>84</sup> Yet he did so with great tact, smiling and laughing all the while, "thereby showing a grace which seems to contrast favourably with the gauche manner of the ambassador."<sup>85</sup> Perhaps he was amused by the Frenchman's impudence. Whatever his thoughts, the king then raised the letter as high as his head, which "was the greatest honour he could have rendered it,"<sup>86</sup> whereupon Chaumont made another deep reverence to his royal host and returned to his seat.

The ambassador subsequently claimed credit for having upheld the honour and dignity of Louis XIV in this way, and on returning to Paris he circulated prints depicting the event, no doubt to enhance his own reputation as a skilled envoy and faithful servant of the Crown.<sup>87</sup> But probably it was only Phra Narai's good humour on this occasion, combined with his native dignity and express commands "to do the impossible to honour the Ambassador of France," that prevented Chaumont's arrogant affront from becoming an ugly diplomatic incident with potentially ruinous consequences. This certainly appears to have been Choisy's view of the whole episode.<sup>88</sup> In any case, Phra Narai's indulgence ensured that the rest of the reception proceeded without incident, as the Asian king and his European guest exchanged civilities for about an hour until trumpets sounded to mark the close of the audience. The curtains then were drawn across the throne window, screening Phra Narai from further view. After a sumptuous lunch the French embassy was conducted from the palace to its new lodgings at Ayutthaya with the same pomp and in the same order as it had arrived.<sup>89</sup>

Despite securing a draft treaty in December that granted extensive concessions to the Compagnie Royale des Indes Orientales and protection to Siamese converts to Catholicism, Chaumont's embassy did not achieve its primary objective of converting the king. In fact, hardly had his small squadron anchored off the Bar of Siam on 23 September than the chevalier had discovered that everything the French court had been led to believe about Phra Narai's personal disposition toward Christianity had been "exaggerated beyond all reality," and that he had no intention of embracing the faith.<sup>90</sup> Nor did any of Chaumont's subsequent exhortations persuade the Siamese monarch to the contrary. Thus, the mission was largely a failure. Nevertheless, direct contact had been opened between the two courts at the official level, and when Chaumont sailed for France on 22 December he took with him the members of Phra Narai's third embassy to Versailles, whose purpose was to request a firm treaty of alliance with Louis XIV.

<sup>84</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 40, 56; Choisy, pp. 154-55; Tachard, p. 171; Bouvet, p. 119; Forbin, p. 476; Souches, I, p. 411.

<sup>85</sup>Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies*, p. 184.

<sup>86</sup>Choisy, p. 155; Tachard, p. 171.

<sup>87</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 36, 40; Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam*, p. 104.

<sup>88</sup>Choisy, p. 155.

<sup>89</sup>Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 43-44; Choisy, p. 156; Tachard, p. 173; Bouvet, pp. 119-20; Forbin, pp. 476-77; Souches, I, p. 411.

<sup>90</sup>Forbin, p. 469; Choisy, *Mémoires*, p. 149; Martin, II, p. 993.

This time the French court was well prepared to receive the Asian envoys and their suite. In addition to reviewing carefully the original reports of Deslandes-Boureau, Mgr. Pallu and the late Father Gayme, Louis and his protocol officers had learned much from their errors of 1684 and shaped their arrangements accordingly. They now had access, as well, to a trove of information on Siamese court ceremonial in the comprehensive relations written by various members of the returning French legation, which they exploited to plan every aspect of the forthcoming reception.

In fact, hardly had Chaumont's ships anchored at Brest on the evening of 18 June 1686 than he and Choisy proceeded to Versailles, where they were questioned extensively by the king. He appears to have been especially interested in the lavish treatment they had received from Phra Narai; for it was the intention of Louis and his ministers to recreate detail for detail the ceremonial observed at Chaumont's reception, using French equivalents for Siamese forms, in greeting the Asian monarch's new embassy to France. This is particularly evident from the separate memorandum written by the chevalier at the king's request, in which he specified the distinctions to be granted the three ambassadors and their suite if Versailles were to mirror exactly the honours he had been paid at Siam.<sup>91</sup> Significantly, Chaumont's recommendations were followed to the letter, as evinced by the arrangements then made to receive the legation. After all the errors committed on both sides in 1684, Louis XIV and his advisers had become far more attentive to Siamese cultural and diplomatic patterns, even if the full implications of these patterns still eluded them. They were also determined to avoid any *faux pas* that could mar the reception of the new embassy or spoil the exalted impression of the French monarch that they wanted to create. For if initial relations with Siam were to succeed, it was imperative that Louis appear not as a European sovereign mobbed by unruly courtiers, which had so appalled the mandarins two years before, but as an Asian despot equal to Phra Narai in every respect.<sup>92</sup> After all, he too understood the need to impress foreign visitors with the "magnificence, power, wealth and greatness" of his crown.<sup>93</sup>

Hence, no sooner had the Siamese ambassadors reached Brest on 18 June than they were welcomed with Asian-style pomp by their European hosts. That evening they were met aboard ship by a large party of royal officers and Breton noblemen, led by the governor of the port and the local intendant de la marine, who compli-

<sup>91</sup>"Mémoire de M. de Chaumont de ce qu'il faut faire pour rendre les mêmes honneurs aux ambassadeurs de Siam, que le roy de Siam en l'a fait à son regard," 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 197-197v. Chaumont recommended that the new ambassadors be met at Brest by royal officials; that they be paid the same honours during their journey to Paris that he had received in Siam; that they be greeted by local and provincial dignitaries along their route; that they be lodged everywhere in the best houses possible; and finally that they be saluted with artillery at every town through which they passed. Chaumont's recommendations corresponded almost exactly to those forwarded to Versailles by the late Father Gayme in 1680.

<sup>92</sup>Despite his detailed description, drawing on contemporary sources, of the arrival of the Siamese embassy to France, its journey to Paris and its first audience with Louis XIV (pp. 373-91), Van der Cruyssen's account fails to draw the obvious connexions supported by the evidence between the ceremonial of the Siamese court and the Sun King's efforts to emulate this for political and propaganda reasons. Otherwise, why would Louis XIV and his officials have expended so much effort on reproducing as nearly as possible the honours paid to Chaumont, or the ritual surrounding the Siamese throne, for the reception of the mandarins in 1686?

<sup>93</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 102.

mented them on their arrival exactly as Chaumont had been welcomed at the Bar of Siam a year before. The next day, they were saluted by cannon as they went ashore aboard a ship's launch improvised into a "balon of state," which was rowed by fifty sailors, adorned with cloth of gold and scores of white satin pennants, and provided even with music for the occasion. Sixty to eighty smaller craft similarly decorated conveyed the lesser members of the embassy to the wharf just as the minor functionaries of Chaumont's suite had been transported at the mouth of the Menam Chao Phraya.<sup>94</sup> On shore, the envoys were greeted by the leading dignitaries of the port, who entertained them lavishly until the arrival in early July of the sieur Storff, a gentleman ordinary of the chambre du roi, appointed by Louis XIV to supply all their needs in the same way that Chaumont had been attended by a Portuguese mestizo in Phra Narai's service as a special courtesy "to give orders for all things."<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, detailed preparations were completed for the ambassadors' trip overland to Paris via the Loire Valley, a route selected by Louis himself no doubt to impress upon his Asian visitors the beauty, breadth, wealth, and power of his realm.<sup>96</sup> In addition to arranging transportation for the embassy and its baggage throughout the journey,<sup>97</sup> orders were given to prepare the château de Berny, just two leagues outside Paris, for the use of the Siamese envoys until their official entry into the city.<sup>98</sup> After that, they would be moved into the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires on the rue du Tournon.

At the same time, explicit instructions were issued from Versailles to render the mandarins and their suite extraordinary honours en route,<sup>99</sup> according to Chaumont's experience and recommendations. At each town through which they passed, the envoys were to be saluted with artillery and greeted by the governor,

<sup>94</sup>Vachet, pp. 180-81; Sainctot, "Reception faite aux ambassadeurs de Siam en 1686," BN. FF. 14118, fols. 133-133v; Donneau de Vizé, *Voyage des ambassadeurs de Siam en France* (Bangkok, 1985), pp. 3-4, 7-8; Michael Smithies, trans., *The Siamese Embassy to the Sun King: The Personal Memorials of Kōsa Pān* (Bangkok, 1990), pp. 17-18. See also Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 141.

<sup>95</sup>Sainctot, 134v-135; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 198; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam 1686," BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459; Dangeau, I, p. 354; Smithies, p. 19; Donneau de Vizé, pp. 9-10. According to Vachet (p. 183), M. Storff "never left the side" of the three envoys during their stay in France.

<sup>96</sup>Their route took them through Rennes, Nantes, Angers, Blois, Chambord, Orléans, Fontainebleau and Vincennes. Originally, Louis had planned to convey the envoys by boat up the Seine River to the French capital, perhaps in accordance with Siamese practice. But he changed his mind, sending them overland instead. (Louis XIV to the sieur de Vaudricourt, 25 June 1686, and to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 56, fols. 119-119v; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Montmart, 25 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 198-198v.)

<sup>97</sup>"Extrait des registres des cérémonies," 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 197v; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Lavardin, 26 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, 198-198v; "Ordre du Roy pour faire fournir les voitures nécessaires pour la conduite des ambassadeurs de Siam de Brest à Paris," June 1686, Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 56, fol. 149v; Donneau de Vizé, 10. For the embassy's baggage, see Sainctot, fol. 140; M. de Montmart to the marquis de Seignelay, 1 July 1686, Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 51, fol. 150v; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Montmart, 12 July 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 198-198v, 199-199v; marquis de Seignelay to M. de Frémont, 25 July 1686, Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 57, fols. 489-489v; Donneau de Vizé, p. 13.

<sup>98</sup>Marquis de Seignelay to M. Lelison and to M. du Metz, 29 July 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 200; Dangeau, I, p. 364; Vachet, p. 182; Sainctot, fols. 137-38.

<sup>99</sup>Vachet, p. 182; Donneau de Vizé, p. 10.

intendant and municipal officials, distinctions reserved customarily for heads of state.<sup>100</sup> A company of bourgeois militia also was to guard the lodgings appointed for the mandarins' comfort when stopping for meals or spending the night (the French equivalent of Siamese "rest-houses"), while the provincial governors and lieutenants-general were instructed to assist the sieur Storff in providing for the ambassadors' needs when passing through their jurisdictions. A special blazon for Siam was even improvised by Versailles to lend still greater dignity to the embassy.<sup>101</sup> Its expenses, meantime, were to be paid entirely by the French crown. Finally, every effort was made to adapt French protocol to the requirements of Siamese cultural patterns. For example, "as it was necessary that the letter [they brought for Louis XIV from] the king their master be more elevated than they," arrangements were made to suspend it high overhead in every house the envoys stayed.<sup>102</sup> A special shelf also was attached to the ceiling of the carriage in which the chief ambassador rode from Brest to Paris for that reason.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, even before 9 July, when the Siamese began their stately journey overland to Paris, an extravagant protocol — modelled after the descriptions of Chaumont, Choisy and other members of the late French embassy — was observed that deliberately surpassed in splendour the ceremonial customarily used in France. Nor were the French given any reason to complain, this time, of their Asian guests' behaviour, thanks largely to the foresight of Phra Narai. Wanting no less to avoid the embarrassments of 1684, he had directed Vachet and the abbé de Lionne (who accompanied the new ambassadors as interpreters) "to teach them European customs and manners" during the outward voyage, these "being very different from his kingdom's."<sup>104</sup> Consequently, the three mandarins were so familiar with French ceremonial by the time they reached Brest that they easily conformed to habits that were otherwise completely alien or even opposed to Siamese practice. In fact, Kōsa Pān, the principal envoy, was well enough versed in French protocol to play skilfully upon the solar imagery surrounding Louis XIV who, he once wrote, "brightens all the world like the Sun . . ." <sup>105</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the three men and their

<sup>100</sup>Sainctot, fols. 134vo-135; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs . . . 1686," BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459; "Extrait des registres des cérémonies," 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 197v; marquis de Seignelay to M. Desclouzeaux, 25 June 1686, and to M. de Lavardin, 26 June 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fols. 198-198v; "Lettre du Roy à mr. le marquis de Molac pour luy dire de faire tirer le canon du château de Nantes lorsque les ambassadeurs de Siam passeront par ladite ville," 25 June 1686, Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 56, fol. 120. See also the "Ordre du Roy pour faire rendre les honneurs aux ambassadeurs de Siam dans les lieux où ils passeront, 6 Octobre 1686," Arch. Nat. B<sup>2</sup> 56, fols. 193-193v; and Georges Lecocq, ed., *Les Ambassadeurs de Siam à Saint-Quentin en 1686* (Paris, 1874), p. 9.

<sup>101</sup>Lecocq, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup>For the same reason, none of the envoys was placed in the room immediately above that containing the royal letter. (Sainctot, fol. 134.)

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 134-134vo.; Smithies, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup>Martin, II, p. 995; Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 134. Artus de Lionne (1655-1713) was the son of the late Hughes de Lionne, marquis de Berny (c. 1671), Louis XIV's former minister for foreign affairs. Artus joined the *Missions-Étrangères* after his ordination as a priest and went to Siam in 1681.

<sup>105</sup>Kōsa Pān to the marquis de Seignelay, September 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 195v.

conduct were praised effusively by their Gallic hosts as being “diametrically opposed . . . to the first two mandarins who gave so much trouble.”<sup>106</sup>

On 30 July the ambassadors finally reached Berry after a journey lasting just over three weeks. Thirteen days later, on 12 August, they made their formal entry into Paris at the head of a long procession of sixty ornate carriages, escorted by a host of royal officials, courtiers, mounted trumpeters and various units of the *Maison du Roi* in obvious imitation of the water-borne cortège by which Chaumont had entered Ayutthaya. From the *Porte St. Antoine*, the procession moved slowly through the city centre, along streets lined with soldiers of the *Gardes françaises*, to the *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires* where the mandarins were entertained as usual on a lavish scale.<sup>107</sup> Three weeks later, on 1 September, they went to Versailles for their first audience with Louis XIV.

This time there were no disputes or missteps over protocol, which emulated in minute detail the ceremonial accorded to Chaumont in Siam, but with particular attention to creating a visual image of the French monarch as an Asian-style despot, the equal of Phra Narai in omnipotence, remoteness from his subjects and even quasi-divinity, according to eastern expectations. Louis and his advisers were acutely aware of the nature and extent of the Siamese king’s authority. Described as an autocrat with the power of life and death over his subjects, Phra Narai was “a most absolute Prince, and a Man may say him to be the *Siamoises* [sic] God”; for he was accorded “such honours as are usually deemed to be due only to God,” and more “becoming a celestial Diety, than an earthly Majesty.”<sup>108</sup> This image of his near divinity was augmented still further by the elaborate ceremonial of his court (the most “ritualistic” in the world, observed Gervaise, and “the most magnificent among all the Black Nations of Asia”), reinforced by the fact that he showed himself in public only twice a year with as much display as possible.<sup>109</sup> Called variously the “king of kings,” “lord of lords” and the “ruler of heaven and earth,” among other titles, Phra Narai was said to recognize no higher authority than his own.

Yet, a parallel image of semi-divine (as opposed simply to divine-right) monarchy found expression also in France, where it influenced Louis XIV’s earliest conception of his role and authority, and undoubtedly motivated his desire in 1686 to emulate Siamese rituals of majesty. As far back as 1625, for example, a general assembly of Catholic clergy had declared that kings not only were ordained by God, “they were gods themselves”<sup>110</sup> — a metaphor echoed in 1643 by the distinguished jurist, Omer Talon. Speaking at the five-year-old Louis’s first lit de justice at the

<sup>106</sup> Abbé de Lionne to Father Vachet, 19 August 1686, Laneau, I, p. 185. See also Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, pp. 135-36.

<sup>107</sup> For the entry and procession through the city, see: *Gazette de Paris*, 3 and 12 August 1686, BN. FF. n.a. 9380, fol. 200v; Donneau de Vizé, 45-50; Sainctot, fol. 138-140v; Vachet, p. 183.

<sup>108</sup> For these and similar descriptions of Phra Narai’s majesty, see: Chaumont, *Relation of the Late Embassy*, p. 77; Gervaise, p. 221; Schouten and Caron, p. 97; Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan . . . together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam*, J.G. Scheuchzer, trans., 2 vols. (London, n.d.), p. 30; L’Isle, pp. 13-14.

<sup>109</sup> Bourges, p. 160; Tavannes, II, pp. 290-92; Gervaise, p. 221; Schouten and Caron, p. 97; Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan . . . together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam*, J.G. Scheuchzer, trans., 2 vols. (London, n.d.), p. 30; L’Isle, pp. 13-14.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Jackson, *Vive le Roi!* p. 218.

parlement of Paris, Talon affirmed that: "The seat of your Majesty represents to us the throne of the living God."<sup>111</sup> Even more recent was the pronouncement of Bishop Bossuet, the strongest proponent of royal absolutism in France, who had declared in 1662 that "the royal throne is not the throne of a man, but the throne of God himself," adding of kings in general that "you are Gods."<sup>112</sup> Such statements were meant to be understood figuratively, of course, and were always carefully qualified. As devout Catholics and Trinitarians, these men would have considered it heretical even to imply that the Bourbon monarch was equal in a literal sense to the Christian God. Yet, it is perhaps significant that Bossuet's address to Louis, in particular, occurred a year after *le Dieu-donné* (as the king was called at birth — a soubriquet with potent overtones for his later self-image) had taken power into his own hands and begun to develop patterns of thought and modes of expression about his royal status that would remain with him throughout his life.

In fact, that Louis aspired to an exalted monarchical ideal that bordered on quasi-divinity is evident from his own *Mémoires for the Instruction of the Dauphin*. "Kings . . . are the sovereign arbiters of the fortunes and of the conduct of men," he solemnly avowed. Heaven-sent as the supreme "trustees" of the public good, their decisions "make for the misery or well-being of the whole earth."<sup>113</sup> Integral to the preservation of royal dignity and its outward expression, however, was court ritual. For that reason, argued Louis, "we must guard nothing more jealously than the pre-eminence that embellishes our post; everything that indicates it or preserves it must be infinitely precious to us." Thus, in his estimation, the essential purpose of this protocol was to elevate the monarch "so far above [all] others that no one else may be confused or compared with him . . . [or] deprive the head of state of the slightest marks of superiority without harming the entire body," since "our subjects . . . usually judge by appearances, and it is most often on amenities and on ranks that they base their respect and obedience."<sup>114</sup> The reception of the Siamese ambassadors gave the king a golden opportunity to integrate the rituals of the two courts and, in doing so, to realize this image in a spectacular way.

With everything now in readiness for the audience, very early on the morning of Sunday, 1 September, the sieur de Bonnetuil (Introducteur des ambassadeurs) and the maréchal-duc de la Feuillade (colonel of the Gardes françaises) arrived at the lodgings of the Asian envoys to escort them and their suite to Versailles, just as two *oyas* had conducted Chaumont to his reception at Ayutthaya the year before. Travelling in another elaborate procession of gilt carriages attended by royal guards, the mandarins reached the palace at 10 a.m. after a journey lasting about six hours. Waiting on parade in the great forecourt of the château were five ranks of blue-clad Gardes françaises opposite an equal number of élite Gardes suisses. The latter were dressed in new red uniforms issued in spring, 1685,<sup>115</sup> long before the French court had conceived any notions of receiving ambassadors from Siam. This was a

<sup>111</sup>Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>112</sup>Quoted in Apostolidès, pp. 85-86. See also Jackson, p. 218.

<sup>113</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, pp. 37, 136, 245.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>115</sup>These were first worn by the Gardes suisses on 22 March 1685. The officers, however, wore blue. See Dangeau, I, p. 139.

fortuitous coincidence, therefore, that must have recalled vividly the scarlet tunics worn by Phra Narai's household troops. Curiously, however, there is no further reference to this colour in the rest of the pageantry, though red — not just blue — was considered royal, too, and had both ceremonial and symbolic significance in seventeenth-century France. Red heels were worn by Louis XIV and his courtiers, for example, as an emblem of their noble status, no less exclusive to their order than fur trim on their clothing or a sword at their hip. (Whether the mandarins noted this custom, however, is unknown.) Red also was important to the French crown as a heraldic device, being the basic tincture of the royal arms of Navarre.

Yet, far more important was the colour's symbolic significance on formal occasions that called for the explicit representation of sovereignty,<sup>116</sup> especially in the administration of royal justice. For that reason, after the monarch, only his chancellor and the presidents of the various parlements wore red robes to ensure that their judgements “would be deemed judgments of the king himself, and have equal authority . . .”<sup>117</sup> Also for that reason, when the sovereign died, these important officials never donned traditional mourning, but continued to wear their vermilion robes to symbolize the perpetuity of royal justice “beyond the personal being of the monarch.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, that Louis XIV and his protocol officers arranged for the *Gardes suisses* to salute Phra Narai's ambassadors at Versailles partly because of their scarlet uniforms, indicates their understanding of another parallel between French and Siamese ritual languages, however different their cultures were in other ways.

Alighting at the inner Royal Courtyard, the mandarins next entered the Salle de Descent or Salle des Ambassadeurs between double files of the *Gardes de la prévôté de l'Hôtel*, where they were to await the hour of their audience.<sup>119</sup> Once word was received that the king was ready to mount his throne, the envoys were escorted across the courtyard into the vestibule of the Ambassadors' Staircase. Inside, Kōsa Pān transferred Phra Narai's letter from its protective casket to a golden saucer carried by the third envoy, before climbing the stairs to the sound of trumpets and drums “in order to imitate the custom of the king of Siam, who never descends into the audience chamber except with such music.” At the threshold of the state rooms, or *Grand Appartement*, the ambassadors were met by the *maréchal-duc de*

<sup>116</sup>Ralph E. Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva, 1960), pp. 55, 57; Apostolidès, p. 14.

<sup>117</sup>Giesey, *Royal Funeral*, p. 57.

<sup>118</sup>Giesey, *Royal Funeral*, p. 57; Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ, 1957), pp. 416, 418. See also Ralph E. Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance souveraine: France, XVe-XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 1987), p. 27. For near-contemporary expressions of this concept, see: François de Scepeaux, *maréchal de Vieilleville, Mémoires*, in Michaud et Poujoulat, IX, p. 63; and Jean Du Tillet, *Recueil des roys de France* (Paris, 1578; reissued, 1618), p. 1,341, to cite just two examples. According to Giesey, the judicial exemption from black mourning is one of the oldest traditions of the royal funeral ceremony. (*Royal Funeral*, pp. 9-10.)

<sup>119</sup>Sainctot, fols. 141v-143; “Account of Baron de Breteuil, Grand Master of Ceremonies, of the Siamese audience at Versailles, 1 September 1686,” in Gillette Ziegler, ed., *At the Court of Versailles*, Simon W. Taylor, trans. (New York, 1966), pp. 238-39; “Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam,” 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fols. 459-459v; Souches, I, p. 436; Donneau de Vizé, pp. 59-63; Smithies, pp. 43-44. Apparently, this room was not near the Ambassadors' Staircase, regrettably destroyed in 1752 by Louis XV's renovations, but on the opposite side of the courtyard near where the Queen's Staircase is today.

Luxembourg (commander of the Maison du Roi) and thirty officers in dress uniform, who led them in procession to their audience.<sup>120</sup>

Although the reception of the Siamese envoys at Brest and their treatment en route to Paris had been extraordinary, much of this initial ceremonial observed at Versailles on 1 September was not. The ambassadors of the king of Morocco (1682), the divan of Algiers (1684) and the tsar of Muscovy (1687), for example, also resided at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs in the capital at Louis's expense. They were taken to the palace in a royal carriage (though without the pomp and parade arranged for the Siamese envoys), where they, too, were greeted in the various courtyards by units of the Maison du Roi. The only real distinction on these occasions was that the troops stood either on parade with their weapons at salute, or simply at attention without arms, depending on whether these representatives were acknowledged as ambassadors of the first order or as simple ordinary envoys.<sup>121</sup> What was unique in 1686, however, and never repeated, it appears, until the end of Louis's reign,<sup>122</sup> was the elaborate protocol observed at the audience itself and its setting. While these other "Asian" embassies were received by the monarch enthroned in the Apollo Salon of the Grand Apartement, attended only by a handful of officials and gentlemen of the royal bed chamber, Phra Narai's representatives were welcomed in the ornate Hall of Mirrors before a huge crowd with all the pomp and circumstance the Bourbon crown could muster, in exact duplication of Siamese royal practice.

To prepare for the audience, at the great gallery's end near the apartment known today as the Queen's bedroom, a platform six to nine feet high had been constructed on which was placed a silver throne. The dais itself was covered with a rich Persian carpet, embroidered with flowers of gold and silver thread to duplicate the floral décor of Phra Narai's audience hall. On each of the steps leading up to the throne stood great silver *torchères*, or candelabra, nine feet tall to imitate the lofty *suppathon* used in Siam as symbols of state. On either side of the platform's base a separate area was reserved for the eight mandarins of the Siamese retinue to kneel during the audience. A spacious semi-circle similarly was traced on the floor in front of the dais for the three ambassadors to salute the king *à la mode de Siam*, without being encumbered by the expected throng of spectators, later estimated at fifteen hundred persons.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup>Sainctot, fols. 144-45v; Breteuil, pp. 239-40; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fols. 459-60v; Sourches, I, pp. 436-37; Donneau de Vizé, pp. 64-66; Smithies, pp. 44-45.

<sup>121</sup>"Audience à Hadgi Giafa Aga, ambassadeur du Divan d'Alger à Versailles 1684," fols. 118-124; "Audience donné à Hadgi Mehemed Thummin, Gouverneur de Tetoën, Ambassadeur de Mula Ismael Roy de Maroc et de Fèze à St. Germain en 1682," fols. 111v-114; "Audience aux Ambassadeurs Extraordinaires de Moscovie en 1687," fols. 175v-177, BN. FF. 14118. For other accounts of these three embassies, see BN. FF. 16633, fols. 213v-215v, pp. 372-75, 476-77.

<sup>122</sup>That audience was arranged in February, 1715, for the Persian ambassador, whom the duc de Saint-Simon suspected was an imposter. See Lucy Norton, trans. and ed., *Historical Memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon*, 3 vols. (London, 1967), II, pp. 403-5.

<sup>123</sup>Sainctot, fols. 143v-44; Breteuil, p. 234; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 459v; Sourches, I, p. 436; Choisy, *Mémoires*, p. 152; Donneau de Vizé, pp. 67-68; Smithies, p. 45.



Sitting on his silver throne, Louis XIV seemed to tower above his court in near-Asian splendour. To help create that effect, he was dressed in a suit of clothes (made expressly for the ceremony) of cloth of gold, set with “prodigiously large diamonds” in obvious imitation of the gem-studded, golden robes worn by the king of Siam.<sup>124</sup> In one respect, however, the French monarch made a fundamental departure from the protocol of his Asian counterpart. Unlike Phra Narai, who always appeared alone at his elevated throne window, Louis was joined on the dais by those male members of the royal family who stood in line of succession to the monarchy, as if sitting with their patriarch for a group portrait.<sup>125</sup> Clustered around him, in short, were the collective present and future embodiments of the Bourbon dynasty, which wore the French crown. Significantly, also forming part of this group were the duc de Maine and the comte de Toulouse, the king’s two natural sons by his former mistress Madame de Montespan, who just recently had been legitimized by royal decree “to secure [their] state,” sniped the contemptuous duc de Saint-Simon.<sup>126</sup>

How the Siamese envoys regarded this extraordinary alteration in otherwise familiar ceremonial is unknown, but the message was not lost on Louis’s court, where this kind of symbolism was understood fully. What the Sun King consciously had done was to raise to the same level as himself the Bourbon princes — including the two royal bastards, whom many courtiers still despised despite their new legal status — by imitating the unparalleled position of Asian despotism. The imperial goals of his Southeast-Asian policy aside, part of his intention clearly was to emphasize and enhance in a visible way the broad social distinction that already divided royal blood, however impure, from that of all other Frenchmen, noble or common.<sup>127</sup> By emulating the spatial separations of height and distance that were integral to Siamese social organization, Louis created a theatrical display of royal pre-eminence, of unrestricted sovereignty, that subtly, though nonetheless powerfully, reinforced his absolutist claims to sole authority in the realm in a manner that far surpassed contemporary European ideals.

On entering the great gallery, the lesser members of the Siamese cortège immediately performed the *krāp* in profound respect for the French monarch, who sat enthroned at the far end. In acknowledgment, he granted them another extraordinary honour strictly prohibited in Siam but usurped by Chaumont, declaring that they “had come too far not to be permitted to look upon him.”<sup>128</sup> Yet, behind this gesture lay a fundamental difference between Siamese and French perceptions of monarchical dignity, misunderstood in 1684, but now recognized in a general way by Louis himself. Where Thai kings rarely appeared in public, being “persuaded that

<sup>124</sup>Sourches, I, pp. 436-37; “Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam,” 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fol. 461; Smithies, pp. 45-46. At the time, it was estimated that Louis’s attire cost two million livres.

<sup>125</sup>This group included the Dauphin, Louis’s son and heir apparent; his grandson, the four-year-old duc de Bourgogne; his brother, the duc d’Orléans; and his nephew, the duc de Chartres. They, too, were dressed in garments studded with diamonds, rubies or emeralds, depending upon the colour of their surcoats.

<sup>126</sup>Saint-Simon, I, p. 62.

<sup>127</sup>Van der Cruysee fails to note the significance of Louis’ act, commenting only that “the sovereign was surrounded by the Dauphin and the princes of his House (p. 390).”

<sup>128</sup>Sainctot, fol. 146v; Breteuil, p. 240; Sourches, I, p. 437; Donneau de Vizé, p. 68; Smithies, p. 45.

they would lose some of their majesty if they revealed themselves too often among their people,"<sup>129</sup> the comparatively "free and easy access of the subjects to the prince," noted Louis proudly, was a "unique characteristic about this monarchy" that contrasted sharply with other nations "where the majesty of kings consists mostly of not letting themselves be seen . . ."<sup>130</sup>

Approaching the throne, meanwhile, Kōsa Pān and his two colleagues performed the *wai* at intervals until, at the foot of the royal dais they too prostrated themselves, rendering the Bourbon monarch a form of homage "that extended almost to adoration . . ."<sup>131</sup> In response, Louis stood, removed his hat and saluted his Asian guests with a polite bow before sitting down again, just as Phra Narai had acknowledged Chaumont's bows with courteous nods of his own. Kōsa Pān then began his formal address in Siamese,<sup>132</sup> with his hands carefully clasped before his face in respect for the king, whom he revered periodically. Each time, Louis responded by doffing his hat.

At the speech's conclusion, the moment arrived for the presentation of the royal letter, the centrepiece of the audience according to Asian protocol. Taking Phra Narai's missive from the third envoy, Kōsa Pān mounted part way up the dais and, with his head lowered, presented it to Louis XIV. Significantly, not only did the French monarch stand and remove his hat to receive it. He advanced two or three paces and, with a slight bow, took up the royal letter which he handed presently to Colbert de Croissy, his minister of foreign affairs. With that simple, yet meaningful gesture, he graciously atoned for the impudence of the chevalier de Chaumont, who had behaved so arrogantly at his audience with the Siamese monarch the year before. The French king and his Asian guests then exchanged civilities a short while longer until, the reception ending, the three envoys and their suite withdrew down the Hall of Mirrors, performing the *wai* as they went. Not once, noted observers, did they turn their back upon Louis, who remained seated on his throne until they had left the gallery. After a sumptuous lunch in the Salle du Conseil and one or two private audiences with other members of the royal family, the Siamese embassy returned to Paris with the same pomp and in the same order as it had arrived at Versailles.<sup>133</sup>

Exactly six months later, on 1 March, the three mandarins and their suite sailed back to Siam, taking with them a second French embassy to Phra Narai. Its purpose was to conclude a firm alliance between the two kingdoms, but this mission also failed to achieve its objective. Although fresh treaties of trade and friendship were negotiated, the steady growth of strong xenophobic sentiment at the Siamese court

<sup>129</sup>Launay, I, p. 51.

<sup>130</sup>Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, p. 101.

<sup>131</sup>Choisy, *Mémoires*, p. 152.

<sup>132</sup>For this address, see the *Harangues Faites à Sa Majesté, et aux Princes et Princesses de la Maison Royale, par les Ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam, à leur première audience, et à leur audience du congé* (Paris, 1687). A modern English translation of these speeches, with a facsimile of the original published French versions, can be found in Michael Smithies, trans., *The Discourses at Versailles of the First Siamese Ambassadors to France*, pp. 24-48.

<sup>133</sup>For the details of the audience itself, see: Sainctot, fols. 146-150v; Breteuil, p. 240; Souches, I, pp. 437-38; Dangeau, I, p. 378; Choisy, *Mémoires*, p. 152; Deslandes, p. 23; "Audience donnée aux ambassadeurs du Roy de Siam," 1686, BN. FF. 16633, fols. 460v-462; Donneau de Vizé, pp. 67-71; Smithies, pp. 45-46.

toward foreigners in general, not just Europeans, did not bode well for the future. Since the century's beginning, Siamese monarchs had relied increasingly on Persians, Moslem Indians, Japanese, Portuguese, and other foreign nationals to staff their governments and reinforce their armies. Thus excluded from power, the native-born nobility grew ever more resentful of these people until, with the arrival of the new French envoys in 1687, along with 636 troops, five warships, and more missionary priests, their hostility reached a breaking point. As a result, just six months after the embassy had left for France in January 1688, Siam exploded in a bloody revolution that toppled Phra Narai's dynasty from the throne (though the old king, who was dying already of asthma, was allowed to perish from the disease), overthrew the French garrison and closed the kingdom to Europeans except, ironically, for a single Dutch trading post. By the time news of the disaster had reached Europe, Louis XIV was engaged heavily in a new war with his continental enemies and was in no position to respond. French contact with Siam thus ended abruptly for the next 150 years.

Nevertheless, the image of the Sun King as an absolute ruler of the Asian type, so carefully contrived in 1686, lingered far into the next century. For some, like Father Joachim Bouvet, S.J., who sailed with the new French embassy to Siam before joining the Jesuit mission in China, this authoritative image seemed more benevolent than that of the actual absolute monarchies of the Far East, whose grandeur had long been envied by European observers. In a relation of the Ch'ing emperor published in 1699 and dedicated to Louis XIV, Bouvet boasted with more than usual hyperbole that:

The Jesuits . . . were not a little surprised to meet at the utmost corner of the Earth with what they had never seen before but in *France*, that is to say; a Prince, who, like Yourself, has improved his sublime Genius by the Greatness of Soul, which alone renders him worthy of the greatest Empire of the Universe; who has the same uncontrolled Power over his Passions, as over his Subjects, equally adored by his People and Esteemed by his Neighbours; . . . In short, a Prince . . . who would without question be accounted the most Glorious Monarch upon Earth, if his Reign had not been coincident with that of Your Majesty.<sup>134</sup>

Others, however, attacked the "oriental despotism" of Louis XIV and its implicit claims to absolutism. After his death, for instance, the marquis d'Argenson criticized the excess and extravagance of the late king's court in general, as an example of unsustainable "Asiatic luxury." More aggressive still were Jurieu and the marquis de La Fare. Contemptuous of the inversion in political importance of crown and kingdom that he saw occurring in his own day, Jurieu lamented generally in 1689 that, where in earlier times "one spoke only of the interests of the state, the needs of the state, upholding the state":

Today it would be *lèse-majesté* to do so. The king has usurped the place of the state, the king is everything, the state is nothing.

<sup>134</sup> Joachim Bouvet, S.J., *The Present Condition of the Muscovite Empire, till the Year 1699 . . . with the Life of the Present Emperor of China* (London, 1699) n.p. (introduction). Bouvet also witnessed the revolution of 1688. See the relation of his voyage to Siam.

He is the idol to which the provinces, the town, finance, the great and the small — in short, everything — is sacrificed.<sup>135</sup>

La Fare was even more direct. Writing after Louis's death, he maligned his late sovereign in particular as "an imitator of the kings of Asia, whom slavery alone pleased; he ignored merit; his ministers no longer thought of telling the truth, but only to flatter and please him . . ." <sup>136</sup> Clearly, the elaborate masquerade that was meant to overawe the Siamese ambassadors in 1686 had impressed contemporary and near-contemporary Frenchmen, too, many of whom feared the onward march of royal absolutism.

But if Versailles was the principal theatre for this developing "cult of monarchy" and the "primary sphere of [royal] influence and power,"<sup>137</sup> then court protocol — which Shakespeare called "thrice-gorgeous ceremony," the "proud dream" that created "awe and fear in other men"<sup>138</sup> — was its chief vehicle of expression and visual representation. In France, as in Siam, it was in the monarch's hands an effective instrument of power that exhibited on a broad and highly ritualized stage his authority and prestige, thus both conserving and securing his rule. As Norbert Elias points out, therefore, royal protocol was neither inflexible nor meaningless, though in both kingdoms too much tampering with accepted forms could incite opposition to the crown. On the contrary, the "exactitude with which each step is weighed, matches the vital importance etiquette and behaviour had" on seventeenth-century people,<sup>139</sup> especially royal people. Consequently, protocol may be defined as a "non-constitutional solemnity" (as Michel de l'Hôpital had termed it a century before) that "contributed to the grandeur of monarchy and heightened the royal function."<sup>140</sup> Hence, spectacles and state ceremonies like the reception of the Siamese ambassadors to France, which fell outside daily life and normal routine, were "intrinsically bound to the exercise of power; [for] the monarch had to dazzle the people."<sup>141</sup> Their function, in short, was one of mystification of the monarchy, which completed the process of distancing the king from his subjects, elevating his authority and prestige, and rendering him the living symbol of the state.<sup>142</sup> That function of image-building was understood and exploited effectively by Louis XIV, who borrowed heavily from Siamese forms to make an exalted, even exaggerated statement about his dignity and the quality of royal blood. It also fitted his absolutist inclinations and conception of his role as monarch.

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<sup>135</sup>Pierre Jurieu, *Les Soupîrs de la France esclave qui aspire après la liberté* (Amsterdam, 1689), p. 131.

<sup>136</sup>Charles Auguste marquis de La Fare, *Mémoires et réflexions du marquis de La Fare*, Émile Raunié, ed. (Paris, 1884), pp. 186-87. La Fare's criticisms were hardly unbiased, however. Like Saint-Simon, he fell into disgrace when he resigned his commission in the royal army at the height of the Dutch war, for which Louis did not forgive him. No doubt this accounts for his ill-will toward the king.

<sup>137</sup>Elias, pp. 74, 119; Apostolidés, p. 137.

<sup>138</sup>William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, John R. Brown, ed. (New York, 1965) Act IV: Scene I, lines 252, 262, 271.

<sup>139</sup>Elias, 101.

<sup>140</sup>Jackson, p. 213; Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance*, p. 69.

<sup>141</sup>Apostolidés, p. 8; Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance*, p. 69.

<sup>142</sup>Apostolidés, 8. See also Sarah Hanley, *The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France: Constitutional Ideology in Legend, Ritual, and Discourse* (Princeton, NJ, 1983) on the role of a king as the living image of the state.