Asia Research Institute
Working Paper Series No. 258

Thailand's First Revolution? The Ayutthaya Rebellion of 1688 and Global Patterns of Ruler Conversion to Monotheism

Alan Strathern
Brasenose College and Faculty of History,
University of Oxford, UK
alan.strathern@history.ox.ac.uk

MAY 2017

The **ARI Working Paper Series** is published electronically by the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

Citations of this electronic publication should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," ARI Working Paper, No. #, Date, www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm. For instance, Smith, John, "Ethnic Relations in Singapore," ARI Working Paper, No. 1, June 2003, www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

Asia Research Institute
National University of Singapore
AS8, #07-01, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent,
Singapore 119260
Tel: (65) 6516 3810
Fax: (65) 6779 1428
Website: https://ari.nus.edu.sg
Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

The Asia Research Institute (ARI) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore (NUS). The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communications hubs. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. Through frequent provision of short-term research appointments it seeks to be a place of encounters between the region and the world. Within NUS it works particularly with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law and Design, to support conferences, lectures, and graduate study at the highest level.

Thailand's First Revolution? The Ayutthaya Rebellion of 1688 and Global Patterns of Ruler Conversion to Monotheism

Alan Strathern
Brasenose College and Faculty of History,
University of Oxford, UK
alan.strathern@history.ox.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

In the 1680s, King Narai, ruler of the cosmopolitan kingdom of Ayutthaya, was the subject of competing Christian and Muslim attempts to convert him to monotheism. Formal embassies from Louis XIV of France and the Safavid court were received with this purpose in mind – but they were embarrassing failures, and helped precipitate a coup in 1688. This paper will briefly set out how this case fits into a larger project of global comparative history, which explains why the rulers of some societies converted to monotheism and others did not. The theoretical approach adopted here includes a distinction between 'divinized' or 'righteous' modes of sacred kingship. But the empirical meat of the paper will be an investigation into what drove the uprising of 1688, for arguably it was more than simply a palace coup. After describing the role of the Buddhist monkhood in the affair, it then considers in more detail the evidence for popular involvement in the rebellion, and the way in which it expressed an element of anti-Christianity. As a movement with conservative and restorative aims, 1688 was not a 'revolution' in the modern sense, but it may have ushered in a new sense that ordinary people had a part to play in determining the legitimacy of royal contenders. The whole case also presents us with some clues as to why it was so hard to convert Buddhist kings.

INTRODUCTION: THE MAIN EVENTS AND QUESTIONS

In the 1680s, Ayutthaya was the dominant power of mainland Southeast Asia, and a great cosmopolitan trading city, reaching the high watermark of its openness to the outside world.[1] Over the course of this decade, a Greek adventurer known as Phaulkon was able to worm his way so far into affairs of state that he became the most powerful figure in the court after the king himself Phra Narai (r. 1656-88). Narai's personality magnified the structural cosmopolitan of his kingdom, for he was extremely interested in establishing relations with all foreign states, from the Dutch to the Persians to the Chinese. He became especially intrigued by what he heard about Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) of France, than at the height of his power in Europe, and Phaulkon helped direct his diplomacy with Paris. Two Siamese embassies reached France and drew crowds of the curious. And two expensively assembled embassies were sent in return, which arrived in Ayutthaya in 1685 and 1687. They were received with awe inspiring levels of pomp and circumstance. The whole affair generated a very large number of reports, memoirs or treatises on Siam written by the French.

The French king and his advisors were partly moved by the scent of colonialist opportunity, although this only really materialised with the second embassy. Crucial to the whole affair from the start in their point of view was the possibility – indeed almost the likelihood as it seemed in Versailles – that Narai would convert to Christianity, and therefore the hundreds of thousands of souls under his command would also convert together with the vassals and petty princes around him, and thus a great new expansion of the Catholic faith on the other side of the world would redound to the glory of the Sun-King of France. Narai's generosity and patronage towards the French mission, his intellectual curiosity, his awkward relations with the Buddhist monkhood (sangha), all gave encouragement. And surely once the sheer brilliance of French culture and the magnificence of French kingship were revealed to this oriental potentate he could not but seek to imitate it. Meanwhile the chain of logic that was being pursued by the Safavid court in Isfahan was remarkably similar, and they also sent an embassy to claim the king's soul, which arrived in 1686. A kind of cold war rivalry brewed between the Cross and the Crescent – although both Cross and Crescent failed spectacularly.

The second French embassy was accompanied by six hundred or so French troops, and their function was ambiguous, indeed ominous. Phaulkon had been enriching himself, and ramping up crown monopolies over trade. Siamese *khunnang* or 'mandarins', as Europeans called the palace officials, saw themselves being side-lined. In 1687, Narai's health declined and the question of succession arose. Amidst the usual turmoil and factionalism, it was rumoured that Narai was about to convert

This working paper is based on a seminar paper given at the Asia Research Institute and the Faculty of History at the National University of Singapore on 8 Feb 2017, and I'd like to register my appreciation for the discussion that followed. The first part of it therefore has minimal references and source citations, and has to deal with theoretical matters in a very brisk manner. The empirical substance of this paper is extracted from a much longer text that is destined for inclusion in a book *Unearthly Powers: Sacred Kingship and Religious Change in World History* (CUP). I would like to thank Chris Baker for all his generosity in helping begin research on Ayutthaya and for reading the longer text (on which this is based). I would also like to thank Vic Lieberman and John Smith for reading the longer test, and Tara Alberts for engaging me with on the subject of persecution. A British Academy for the Mid-Career Research Fellowship allowed me the research leave to finish my work on Siam, and I am also grateful to ARI for their support during my period as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow there.

1 The following events will be dealt with in much more detail in my forthcoming, *Unearthly Power*s…. Dirk van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West, 1500-1700*, translated by Michael Smithies (Chiang-Mai, 2002) may be consulted for a detailed narrative of events.

to Christianity or install as his successor a palace favourite who would convert.[2] Up stepped a pretender, the commander of the royal elephants, Phetracha, who engineered a complex and extremely successful palace coup while Narai lay on his deathbed. Phaulkon died a particularly horrible death. The French were humiliated, their troops in Bangkok were besieged and then allowed to depart with their tail between their legs. Christians were rounded up and flung into jail.

Some of the French observers referred to this as a revolution; indeed they compared it with another and no-less frustrating event of that year, the so-called 'glorious revolution' of 1688 which had brought the Protestant William of Orange to the throne of England.[3] In both cases, a king with Catholic and French leanings was usurped by a pretender antagonistic to both France and the True Faith. If contemporaries used the language of 'revolution', may we follow suit? In fact, the title to this paper risks speciousness because, strictly speaking, the answer is quite clearly negative. The events of 1688 would not count as a revolution according to any modern definition with real analytical bite. The term 'revolution' is best reserved for movements to effect structural change in the nature of state and society, where it is not only the incumbents of office or particular policies that are challenged but the principles on which power is distributed and wielded.[4] Like the vast majority of rebellions in the pre-modern world, the aims of the 1688 conspirators were conservative: to restore the monarchy to traditional forms. At its heart were the age-old dynamics of succession dispute and palace coup.

And yet, perhaps 1688 signifies something more than that too. For the French sources describe Phetracha's plot as depending on the mobilization of the populace of Lobpuri and indeed across the kingdom, which in turn depended in part on the mobilization of the sangha. To what extent then should 1688 be seen as an assertion of Buddhist pugnacity or an expression of anti-Christianity? Does this tell us anything about how Buddhist identity construction worked in pre-modernity or early modernity? Moreover, if there was a popular dimension to 1688, does this indicate that the masses were to some extent beginning to make their presence felt as a political force? Or were they merely following orders? What had aroused them? It has now become common to refer to Asian societies as participating in a global 'early modernity' – a concept that many scholars find both vexing and bewitching. If 1688 in Britain is emblematic of the forces of European early modernity, might the Ayutthayan 1688 have any similar resonances?

Another kind of question lurks behind all of these, for we are dependent on European sources to a great degree. These are voluminous, but the destruction of the archives of Ayutthaya after its sacking by the Burmese in the 1760s is a terrible loss. The problem is: to what extent can we trust French sources to yield insights on the inner workings of Siamese society? What if their sociological presumptions are hopelessly inapposite?

All these questions are in turn grist to the mill of a much larger enquiry. The case of Siam in the 1680s forms one case study in a project of global comparative history, which has the working title, *Unearthly Powers: Sacred Kingship and Religious Change in Global History*. This began with this question: why did the rulers of some societies convert to monotheism and others did not? Central to

2 Claude de Bèze, *Mémoire du Pere de Bèze sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon, premier minister du roi de Siam Phra Narai et sa triste fin*, ed. Jean Drans and Henri Bernard (Tokyo, 1947), 95-100, 144-5.

3 Jean Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire de la révolution de Siam arrivée en l'année 1688* (Lille, 1691), dedication.

4 Theda Skocpol *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge 1979), distinguishes political and social revolutions, but neither apply here

this is the question of legitimacy. How much does religious legitimacy matter in the pre-modern world – as opposed to, say, sheer coercion or its secular forms? Why would conversion damage the legitimacy of a ruler in one society and even elevate it in another? Does the particular kind of religion that prevails in each society matter? Apart from Ayutthaya, the other case studies are: Central Africa in the late fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, particularly Kongo, whose kings converted to Catholicism; Oceania in the early nineteenth century, particularly Hawaii, which saw the rapid conversions of chiefs in the early nineteenth; Japan in the later sixteenth century, where some warlords in Kyushu converted along with hundreds of thousands of their followers, only to suffer persecution with the reunification of the realm under the Tokugawa.

A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON RELIGIOUS TYPOLOGY

It is not possible to provide an adequate account of the theoretical perspective that I am developing for the overall comparative project in the space of this paper, but it is influenced by the literature on the Axial Age, a term used to describe the philosophical revolutions of first millennium BC West Asia, Greece, India and China.[5] In religious terms, these gave rise to what may be referred to as transcendentalism, which I take to be the ideological core of monotheistic and Indic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism.

Transcendentalism may be distinguished by an orientation towards liberation or salvation as an ineffable future state of being that represents the highest end of man. The attainment of 'salvation' is associated with submitting to universal truth claims, which it is understood that others will wrongly reject – this is what Ernest Gellner meant when he referred to them as offensive ideologies.[6] The salvific end is also closely associated with living in accordance with a set of universal ethical principles, which are also guides to an interior reconstruction of the self. So: soteriology, epistemology, morality, interiority.[7] Transcendentalism entails a canonisation of sacred texts and the attempt to curtail revelation. And it creates clerical elites who evolve strong institutional traditions; they preserve a distinct autonomy from the state but also claims the right to ethical arbitration over it.

Transcendentalism may be distinguished from an even broader, indeed universal form of religiosity, which I refer to as immanentism. This is defined by the attempt to call upon supernatural power to assist life in the here and now: to make the fields fertile, the sick healthy, to ensure victory in the next battle. This power is everywhere seen to be in the gift of what Marshall Sahlins calls metapersons, i.e. ancestors, spirits, deities.[8] Every society has peopled reality with these beings, no doubt testifying to the influence of evolved properties of the human mind.

Immediately, it must be underlined that even when a transcendentalist tradition acquires a certain dominance, immanentism always emerges from within to shape religious practice: Jesus and Muhammad may cast down the idols, but their followers will come to pray to a new set of metapersons in the form of saints. The Buddha may deplore mere magic in some of the canonical texts, but the traditions make him a miracle-worker too and after his death his relics were granted

5 See, for example, Shmuel Eisenstadt, *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Civilization* (Albany, 1986).

6 Ernest Gellner, 'Notes towards a theory of ideology,' in *Spectacles and Predicaments* (Cambridge,1979).

7 I have outlined fifteen distinguishing features of transcendentalist religions in a draft of the theoretical part for *Unearthly Powers*.

8 Marshall Sahlins, 'Inaugural Hocart Lecture: The Original Political Society', Centre for Ethnographic Theory, SOAS, London, 29 April 2016.

magical powers. These developments cannot be considered a matter simply of the survival of older forms, but are the result of deeply rooted human cognitive and emotional proclivities.

These two modes correspond to two different ways of sacralising and thereby in a sense creating kingship. The immanentist mode involves making the king equivalent to a metaperson or deity: to push him into touching distance of the gods so that he can ensure that their powers and protection benefit his subjects. The king is therefore primarily a kind of ritual pivot, an interlocutor with the divine: this may be called *divinized kingship.*[9] The humanity and mortality of kings is often problematized as a result and may need to be effaced through ritualization. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, gives rise to what may be called *righteous kingship*, where kings are sacred because they are guardians of a system of truth-ethics-salvation. In themselves they may be mortal and human; but their responsibility is awesome. Here it is the amoral or immoral dimension to political rule that must be effaced.

This distinction between the two modes may be hard to see in real life given how often they are in fact combined: this was indeed the norm across much of Asia. The monotheistic traditions tended to resist the divinized mode more stubbornly, albeit far from comprehensively (indeed, the early modern period saw Islam pushed as far as it would go in that direction in the shape of the Safavids and Mughal kingship).[10]

What happens when proselytisers attempt to convert rulers whose office has been fashioned according to these two kinds of sacralisation? How do these modes function to obstruct or facilitate conversion? A priori it may seem as if the more divinized a ruler, the more ridiculous becomes the prospect of his conversion – especially if what is on offer is Christianity, which allowed relatively little divinization per se. Why destroy the very thing that exalted your status most in the eyes of your subjects? There was also the prospect of the retaliation of the gods to consider.

SACRED KINGSHIP IN SIAM

The form of kingship that had developed in Ayutthaya by the late seventeenth century is striking for the sheer extent to which it had been sacralised in the dimensions of both divinization and righteousness. Is it possible to surmise which of these proved to be a more frustrating obstacle to missionary ambitions?

The elaborate divinization of the king in Ayutthaya has been connected with the influence of Angkorean tradition. Indeed, Narai's predecessor, Prasat Thong (r. 1629-56), drew on this regional inheritance quite deliberately in order to push Ayutthayan kingship in this direction. The extent to which the king's body was ritualized and concealed is reminiscent of traditions of kingship found in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. All forms of interaction with the king in the palace were subject to intricate protocol, and by the 1680s Narai was only showing himself to his people outside the palace once a year, in the *kathin nam*¸ a barge procession along the river.[11] The consecration ritual conveyed the idea that the king was a manifestation of the principal gods of the Indic pantheon. The king of Ayutthaya was even, as some African kings are noted for in the ethnographic record, a ritual device for controlling the elements: in the speeding of the outflow ceremony, the king rode out on

9 In fact, to employ the terms used in my *Unearthly Powers* MS, these comments are especially pertinent for one of two sub-types of the 'divinized' category namely 'cosmic kingship'.

10 Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, (Columbia, 2012).

11 *Simon de La Loubère*, *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère "Du Royaume de Siam", ed.* Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h *(Paris, 1987), 221-2.*

to a barge and touched the floodwaters to make them dissipate, although Narai rather intriguingly abandoned this rite in 1676.[12]

One of the historiographical problems we face is our dependence on European sources, but on this point here we are fortunate to be able to call on a travel narrative, *The Ship of Suleiman,* written by the scribe of the Persian embassy, Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi, following the voyage to Siam in 1686. The Persians arrived from the court of the most divinized of all Muslim kings, and yet they too, no less than the Europeans, were struck by how much the king of Siam presented himself as a deity, and the strict prostration to which all approaching the king were subject.[13] Indeed Narai himself seems to have been somewhat irked by the restrictions on his life that these structures imposed, for he spent most of the year at a smaller scale residence in Lobpuri to the north, where he could go hunting.

A priori, one can certainly see how this may have formed an obstacle to the designs of the French ambassadors. This was certainly the apprehension the perspicacious Abbé de Choisy, standing on the banks of the Chao Praya River and watching the spectacle of the king's annual waterborne procession of the *kathin nam*. As he recorded in his journal entry for 4th November 1685. This was the occasion that Choisy famously claimed made him feel pity for

> 'this poor king, when I saw him in this pomp, passing before two hundred thousand people who lined the riverbanks, and who with hands joined and face pressed to the earth rendered him divine honours: how could a poor man accustomed to these adorations not imagine that he was above humanity; and how difficult it will be to persuade him to submit to all the humiliations of the Christian religion[14]'

What the Abbé de Choisy projects on to the king here is the anxiety that if he divested himself of ritual element of his office, then all the charisma would drain away too… He was right that the Christian form of sacred kingship on offer was much less divinized. The Siamese ambassadors in Versailles in 1684 were perplexed to see 'the frantic jostling' around the person of Louis XIV as they were led towards him and had to be allowed to prostrate themselves for their own comfort.[15] And anyway, in dropping to the floor the old traditions and taking up the new might not a converting king appear momentarily naked? Might his not his subjects see that the emperor was all clothes?

This projection is not implausible. But we have few means of knowing what role, if any, this played in delivering the rejection of Christianity in 1688. What we can see in the events of 1688, quite clearly, I think, is the significance of the *righteous* dimension to the king's sacrality. In one sense, in the normal course of events, this is usually less visible – it does not materialize so readily in ritual. Above all, in Siam it inhered in the triangular relationship between the king, his subjects and the sangha. For is it not extraordinary that such an exalted king still needed to bow to the monks rather than vice versa?[16] This expresses what Gunawardana referred to as the 'antagonistic symbiosis' between king

12 Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites Envoyez par le Roy aux Indes & à la Chine: avex leurs Observations, Astronomiques, et leurs Remarques de Physique, de Géographie, d'Hydrographie, & d'Histoire* (Paris, 1686), 260.

13 [Muhammad *Rabi] Ibn Muhammad* Ibrahim*, The,Ship of Sulaiman*, translated from the Persian by John O'Kane (London,1972), 64, and see 96, 139.

14 François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686* (Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687), 244.

15 Van de Cruysse, *Siam*, 250-1.

16 *La Loubère*, *Étude historique, 397*-8, 439, 452; Tachard, *Voyage*, 416; Nicolas Gervaise, *Histoire naturelle et politique du Royaume du Siam* (Paris, 1688), 190-1.

and sangha, which could even break out into conflict as it did at times in Narai's reign.[17] In effect the European sources are picking up on the righteous dimension of royal sacralisation every time they marvel at the social status of the sangha, their great moral authority, and their sheer pervasive presence – which they did repeatedly and emphatically over the seventeenth century.[18]

THE ROLE OF THE SANGHA IN THE REBELLION OF 1688

It is at this point that a close examination of what happened in 1688 is pertinent. For I think the evidence is quite clear that the agency of the sangha was crucial. Phaulkon, indeed, closer to the inner workings of the Ayutthaya court than any other European, saw more clearly than anyone else that the legitimacy of the king depended upon his upholding Buddhism and that if he tried to abandon it, the moral authority of the sangha would translate into political opposition. Indeed in secret documents sent to Versailles in 1685, he laid out a plan for the use of subterfuge and military force in implanting Christianity – in other words, overcoming a massive legitimacy deficit through sheer coercion.[19] He was therefore among those prompting the French to send troops to accompany the 1687 embassy.

For the French, 1688 was shocking because it seemed to overturn European ethnological understandings of what kind of a place Ayutthaya was and what kind of a people the Siamese were. The standard image of the city was one of wondrous cosmopolitanism, which extended to the remarkable religious tolerance of the political authorities who were happy to allow missionaries to work, and even to patronise them. Indeed, on one level it seemed like a perfect mission ground – except for the puzzling fact that hardly anyone ever actually converted.[20] This was mirrored in how Europeans saw the sangha. Missionaries were set up to see the monks as their principal rivals and enemies, and in Japan Buddhist monks were often decried as agents of the devil. In Siam, however, the monks seemed not to play their allotted part: they offered a generally benign countenance, demurred from debate, remarked that your religion had quite a lot of good in it – and yet still seemed no closer to conversion.

Now, in fact behind the scenes, as it were, the Buddhist monkhood was developing a form of intellectual opposition to Christianity.[21] The French began to report that monks saw Christ as the figure of Devadatta in the scriptures. Only a few picked up what a devastating attack this amounted to.[22] For Devadatta was a jealous brother or cousin of the Buddha who tried to tear the sangha apart by leading a more ascetic and extreme breakaway faction and ended up trying to kill Buddha. He paid for his sins through incarceration in a hell, with iron spikes running through his body vertically and horizontally, and this was soon identified with the image of Christ crucified. By 1685, it seems

17 R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*: *Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson, 1979) 344.

18 Just one example: Gervaise, *Histoire*, 65.

19 Memoir of Phaulkon for Tachard, December 1685, in Adrien Launay, (ed.) *Histoire de la Mission de Siam. Documents historiques*, 2 vols (Paris, 1920), vol. I, [Henceforth 'Launay'], 179-80; Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 Oct 1687, Tokyo Bunko MS 77; and the longer letter to Père de la Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tokyo Bunko MS 48.

20 On the failure to make conversions, see Tara Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2013), 62-5.

21 From at least 1662, as Alain Forest, *Les missionaires francais au Tonkin at au Siam (XVIIe-XVIIe siècles). Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un échec total*, 3 vols (Paris, 1998), vol. III, 283.

22 Above all, Tachard, *Voyage*, 398-410.

that monks were spreading rumours that Narai would die for being 'an enemy of religion', as Phaulkon put it.[23] In 1687 and 1688 astrological predictions of a great change to affairs of state surfaced to further stir the increasingly febrile atmosphere.

Behind all this, of course, also lay the machinations of Phetracha. Although the Buddhist doctrine of merit acted as an important means of justifying successful rebellions – because rebels who seized the throne necessarily demonstrated their superior supply of merit, much like the Chinese 'Mandate of Heaven' or the Hawaiian principle of *mana* – still Phetracha lacked any royal blood. Like most usurpers he seems to have felt somewhat exposed in terms of his legitimacy. What he clothed himself with were the garments of Buddhist piety – indeed, quite literally, for he wore an ochre coloured robe that approximated that of a monk. In fact, this practice dated back to the year he had spent in a monastery following the death of Narai's queen in 1680. He had made the most of his time in the wat, excelling as a monk and developing strong connections with the monastic hierarchy, and in particular the Sangkharat of Lobpuri.[24] Such behaviour allowed Phetracha to sound convincing when he claimed that his ambitions for his own person extended no further than the temple, and that his only objective was to preserve Buddhism. He was simply carrying out his duty to safeguard the monks from the attacks of a Christian successor.[25] Thus he deployed the discourse of righteousness.

Phetracha's alliance with the sangha bore fruit during the preparations for the coup. There was no other institutional structure that could rival the sangha in its penetration of all levels of society across the whole kingdom. It was not a thing of the court; it was something that men from all social ranks passed in and out of, and the monks daily did their rounds of alms-begging among the laity. Phetracha used the wats of Lobpuri to assemble his supporters, and when the coup was finally triggered on 18 May, leading the crowd to the palace walls was the Sangkharat of Lobpuri, held aloft on the shoulders pf those below, and it was he who broke the taboos around the palace by pushing the side-door open and letting the crowd file in.

THE AGENCY OF 'LE PEUPLE'

But what do we make of the crowd? I was here intrigued by a comment made by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit in their forthcoming history of Ayutthaya that they were kind enough to let me see in draft form.[26] Previously I think the tendency has been to downplay the novelty of 1688 a little. Although it may bulk large in the French texts, from the perspective of Thai history it can seem just one of a whole string of palace coups and usurpations. Baker, however, notes that there were two new elements in 1688: the monkhood and the mob.

Before we endorse that suggestion, however, it would do well to scrutinize the nature of the French sources on which we rely. It would appear, in fact, that they all impose a sociological vision on Siam structured according to the three estates theory of the French *Ancien Régime*: instead of the church, the nobility and the people, we have the monks, the mandarins and the people. The identification of the sangha as a distinct element of society is not really problematic. It is not an orientalist distortion

23 Tokyo Bunko MS 48.

24 Bèze, *Mémoire*, 77-8.

25 Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, 13-14; Marcel Le Blanc, *History of Siam in 1688*, trans M. Smithies (Chiang Mai, 2003), 21; accounts in Michael Smithies, *A Resounding Failure, Martin and the French in Siam, 1672-1693* (Chiang Mai, 1998), 84, 90, also note the role of the sangha and populace.

26 Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam in the Early Modern World* (CUP, 2017)

to recognize, for example, that the sangha played a *roughly* equivalent role in Siamese society to that of the church in Europe. And as will be evident from the analysis above, their role in 1688 is clear.

But what about the references to the masses – nearly always summoned with the phrase, 'le peuple' – as an agent in these events? We must consider whether they were merely a chimera of Eurocentric perception. The crowd that marched to the palace might merely testify instead to the hierarchical operation of Siamese society, in which the *khunnang* could mobilise large numbers of men through the royal labour system, personal retainership and slavery.[27] It is certainly true that 1688 indicates that the necessary reliance on *khunnang* for the orchestration of corvée labour placed a powerful weapon in their hands that could be turned against the king. Desfarges tells us that one of Phetracha's allies was the official who kept the registration records, which were used to summon *phrai luang* to the wats.[28] The personal retainers (*phrai som*) which the rebel *khunnang* had accumulated in large numbers were also mobilized, as were those in debt bondage or 'slaves' (*that*).[29]

There are, however, several reasons, for concluding that there was a genuinely popular dimension to the mobilization that went beyond merely following orders.[30] First, according to Claude de Bèze, on the eve of the coup, the manpower available to Phetracha was deemed insufficient, and this prompted Phaulkon to turn to the hierarchs of Lobpuri to rise up the people.[31] The implication is that the monkhood was used to mobilize sections of the population not reached via normal patron-client relations or corvée mechanisms.[32] Second, we may note the sheer extent of the mobilisation in social and territorial terms. It is useful to refer here to a Portuguese account by Francisco Nogueira, based in Japan, whose sources and biases were somewhat different to that of the French, but who also refers to 'a general conspiracy among all the people.'[33] The uprising took in the provinces, where monks had been deployed to garner support.[34] Tellingly, it operated even in areas where key positions were in the hands of supporters of Phaulkon and Narai, as with the governor of the city of Ayutthaya itself.[35] Le Blanc records that the people of that city heard of events in Lopburi with joy,

27 This is roughly how Dhiravat na Pombejra, 'A Political History of Siam Under the Prasatthong Dynasty: 1629-1688' (PhD. Thesis, University of London, 1994) 149-50 describes what happened in earlier succession struggles, as for example that of Prasat Thong.

28 Desfarges, *Relation des revolutions arrivées a Siam dans l'année 1688* (Amsterdam, 1691), 10. Also see the account by Lieutenant de La Touche, *Relation de ce qui est arrivé dans le royaume de Siam en 1688*, translated in Michael Smithies (trans., ed.). *Three Military Accounts of the 1688 'Revolution' in Siam* (Bangkok, 2002), 61, which reports that Phetracha deployed those 'in his faction who were city and army governors to come and join him', and they brought an army of 70-80,000.

29 Le Blanc, *History,* 40. See Pombejra 'Political History', 71-3 on *that*.

30 On assuming the crown, Phetracha took several measures to please the lower orders, and which according to Desfarges, *Relation*, 47, helped to cement his position. According to Le Blanc, *Histoire,* 147, he had previously been developing an image as the protector of the poor.

31 Bèze, *Mémoire*, 115.

32 Le Blanc, *Histoire*, 49-50 describes the ill-disciplined crowd as 'all slaves and natives who carried arms for the first time in their lives', but it also includes the Muslim house-guards he controlled.

33 Francisco Nogueira 'The Account of Father Francisco Nogueira about events in Siam 1687-168,' Translated and ed by Maria Conceição Flores, in *500 Years*, 218.

34 Bèze, *Mémoire,* 100-101.

35 Le Blanc, *History*, 54.

such that the governor could not dare 'oppose the fatal torrent which swept everyone away'.[36] One missionary observed that:

> 'It is also certain that the whole kingdom was under arms; every day we saw armed men going up to Louvo; the whole way from [the city of] Siam to Louvo was full of them. The lowest of the populace and even the oarsmen of the barges bore arms, something unheard of in the kingdom, except in a period of revolution or extraordinary trouble.' [37]

Third, the French accounts consistently emphasize the emotional arousal of the local population. For example, just after the arrest of Phaulkon, Phetracha had some French officers at Lobpuri taken to Thale Chupson fearing that 'the People, animated as they were against the foreigners' would turn on them.[38] But the French officers decided to make an escape. As part of their flight – and with shades of the picnic episode – they had taken over a barge of monks. The monks then proceeded to raise up 'the people' who came to avenge this outrage and clustered on the river banks.[39] The officers ended up holed up in a wat; they were lured out and the 'population' attacked them.[40] General Desfarges, whose son was one of these officers, reports that

> They were then put on display in Louvo before a multitude of rascals for three hours, who spat in their faces and committed every imaginable outrage. This story… caused me to reflect on the extremity of our affairs given the extreme hatred the People showed towards us'[41]

In the fort at Mergui meanwhile, Lieutenant de La Touche was betrayed by the Siamese soldiers placed under him. As he was walked under guard through the town, he claims that he was slapped and kicked by the crowd, who called out 'Here's another Frenchmen, take him away, crucify him!' This does not seem unlikely given the role of crucifixion in mustering intellectual and visceral opposition to Christianity.[42]

Fourth, there is some evidence that the 'people' had their own political sensibility and sense of legitimacy, which became clear when Phetracha had to reveal that he was not going to retire to the wat after all. He could only effect the switch from acting as a supporter of the existing dynasty to one hoping to supplant it by making it seem as if the order for the princes' deaths had been issued by Narai.[43] But he could not avoid the sense that he had betrayed the princes, who had particular

36 Le Blanc, *History*, 55.

37 Abbé de Lionne, 4 January 1692, in Launay 212.

38 Desfarges, *Relation*, 18. Recall that Phetracha wished to be rid of the problem of the French without stimulating an aggressive French counter-action.

39 Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, 64.

40 Le Blanc, *History*, 62.

41 Desfarges, *Relation*, 32.

42 La Touche in Smithies (trans., ed.). *Three Military Accounts*, 81-2. This phrase is in Latin, evoking the crowds demanding the crucifixion of Jesus. Smithies suggests it is implausible because the crowd would not have known Latin. Of course the phrase is a translation, but in the light of the role played by the figure of Devadatta in anti-Christian discourse it is not all unlikely that the crowd would have referred to crucifixion.

43 Le Blanc, *History*, 105. According to Desfarges, *Relation*, 34, Phetracha had sworn a holy oath that he was acting in behalf of the princes.

support in the city of Ayutthaya.[44] And according to De Bèze, their execution on 25 July turned both the monks and the 'people' against Phetracha, seeing that his concern for the 'public good' merely masked his own ambition. They even briefly took up arms in Ayutthaya but by then he had mastery of the military.[45]

There is a broader context in which one might situate this nascent popular agency. The shift to an increasingly commercialized economy in Siam rendered the existing system of corvée labour increasingly anachronistic insofar as it obstructed the emergence of a fluid labour market.[46] One consequence of this was *phrai* began selling themselves into *that* status ('slavery') in order both to escape royal service and raise capital to start businesses, and increasing numbers of *that* then ran away in order to seek further opportunities. A set of laws quickly passed by Phetracha in 1690 indicate a general anxiety about banditry and crime and the need to claw back control over labour and the movements of the populace. More speculatively, an increasingly urbanized and entrepreneurial population might anyway be expected to display a greater sense of their own capacity to influence the political sphere.

1688 itself seems to have unleashed a new sense of possibility. Chris Baker argues that from this point on people were more difficult to control, and refers to a number of revolts in the aftermath.[47] The Khorat governor refused to drink the water of allegiance and was supported by a local monk, and his town held out for three years. More serious was the rebellion of a Mon monk, Thammathian, who disguised himself as the prince Aphaithot, studied magic and led a movement towards the capital. Ayutthaya was thus besieged by a randomly armed mass, an 'undisciplined rabble' according to Kaempfer – which is exactly how Le Blanc had described the rebels in 1688.[48] These events in the aftermath of 1688 reinforce the sense that commoners might be emboldened to join in snowballing movements to besiege the capital on their own account rather than simply as creatures of the *khunnang*. They illustrate too the continuing political relevance of the sangha. Lastly, that these rebellions tended to raise up of contenders claiming to be related to Narai or even one of the dead princes, is rather good evidence in support of De Bèze's contention that Phetracha's coup suffered a serious legitimacy crisis of its own as soon as it became clear that he intended to replace the princes.

THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANITY?

But what then drove the crowd? There is not the space here to consider the issue of xenophobia and what this may or may not say about the existence of a politicized form of Thai ethnicity in this period. But we can broach the question of religion, which current historiography somewhat downplays as a dynamic force in 1688. What we have to explain is why, in the weeks after Phaulkon's arrest, Phetracha had most or all of the Christians in Lobpuri and from wider afield rounded up and put into prison. Once again, however, there are reasons to be careful in assuming what this signified. Here, the source criticism problem is the Christian paradigm of martyrdom, through which an experience

44 Bèze, *Mémoire,* 96

45 Bèze, *Mémoire,* 146-7. From the perspective of the siege of Bangkok, Desfarges, *Relation*, 47-9, notes that the death of the princes, among other factors, 'dampened the fury of the Siamese against us, which was at first so great and general.'

46 I am very grateful to Chris Baker for discussing the issues raised in the paragraph, which are also addressed in Baker and Phongpaichit, *History of Ayutthaya* (forthcoming).

47 Bake, *Ayutthaya*, forthcoming. Also see Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, ca. 1604-1765* (Leiden, Boston, 2007), 161-4.

48 Engelbert Kaempfer, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690* (Bangkok, 1998), 37.

of suffering is liable to be presented as persecution on the grounds of faith. Missionaries departed their homelands half-expecting a glamorously painful end. Hence Le Blanc rushes to compare the plight of the prisoners of Lobpuri with the better known martyrs of Omura in Japan.[49]

It is important then to establish whether the treatment of foreigners and Christians during the coup served immediate political ends which the French sources, and particularly the Jesuits, misconceived. A later wave of imprisonment of Frenchmen and missionaries towards the end of the affair in October, seems to have been due to Phetracha's desire for a bargaining chip to play in his negotiations with the French over their departure and the handing over of Phaulkon's wife.[50] But the chronology of the imprisonment within the first month or so indicates that Phetracha allowed most harassment of Christians when he least needed to influence French behaviour. His political interests were split: evidently he needed to ride a wave of popular anger in order to establish his domestic position, but he also needed to rein in such emotions so as not to weaken his foreign policy, for he did not want to precipitate a French reprisal. In the first two weeks of the coup, from 18 May to 1st June, Phetracha was particularly cautious because he could not yet predict the response of the French in Bangkok and had not yet secured his authority over Ayutthaya.[51] In this period several sources indicate that some or most of the Christians in Lobpuri had been arrested.[52] To those Frenchmen, such as the Abbé de Lionne, whom Phetracha needed to use as go-betweens with Bangkok, it was explained that the arrests were merely 'the fury of the Populace.'[53] However once Desfarges had been lured out of Bangkok to visit Lobpuri, Phetracha loosened the reins. Around the 1st June 'all Christians were put in prison without any distinction of age, sex, or nationality', according to De Bèze.[54] Once Desfarges had been received, told off and dispatched, and once it was clear that he was not going to attempt to defend Phaulkon, the Greek minister could finally be executed, on 5th June. This was

> 'followed by a general attack on Christianity. The churches and sacred vessels were profaned, the houses of Christians were pillaged; they were themselves stripped, and taken away weighed down by chains. In a few days the prisons in Louvo were so full that new ones had to be built in all quartered of the town.[55]

49 Le Blanc, *History*, 88; and see 101.

50 See Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, 138-140; a letter of Kosa Pan, 12 December 1693 in Launay, 28; Beauchamp's account in *Witnesses to a Revolution*, 82; a letter of Beauchamp 17 Nov 1689, in Smithies, *Seventeenth Century*, 263

51 See Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, 63-4; Bèze, *Mémoire,* 127-30

52 The sources diverge a bit on chronology. Vollant des Verquains, ibid., which is close to the anonymous *Relation des principals circonstances qui sont arrive dans la Révolution du Royaume de Siam en l'anée 1687*, in Smithies, *Witnesses*, p. 16 and Desfarges, *Relation*, 22-3, place the arrests before the Abbé de Lionne's visit on 25 May, as do letters from Lionne (Launay, 207) and Francisco Nogueira in Smithies ed, *500 Years*, 220: 'they immediately began to imprison all the Christians who were at that time in Louvo.' See also Véret, 3 March 1689, in Robert Lingat, 'Une lettre de Véret sur la révolution siamoise de 1688' *T'oung Pao* 31, (1935), 351-2.

53 Desfarges, *Relation*, 22-3.

54 Bèze, *Mémoire,* 125; Le Blanc, *History*, 71, also has it that the Christians were arrested by the time Desfarges arrived on 2nd June. Phaulkon's seals of office were taken, his house ransacked and finally his wife arrested at this time.

55 Le Blanc, *History*, 88. Compare the Anonymous*, Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo, royaume de Siam, avec un abregé de se qui cest pasé a bancoq pendant le siege en 1688*, in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, 102.

Phaulkon, the protector of the Christians, was no more, and 'as the Christians were hated by everyone, no one was afraid of being upbraided by causing them to languish in prison.'[56]

At no point, however, was Phetracha himself anything less than calculated. He never sought to close down diplomatic communication or the possibility of amicable relations with France. This is surely the reason why the Jesuits alone were allowed a kind of liberty and even protection.[57] Their special treatment puzzled the other Frenchmen and led to rumours that they had bribed the new ruler. Most likely they were seen as a hotline to the French throne; this was Phaulkon's one concession to theological diplomacy. But it is striking that this official status of the Jesuits had to be preserved against popular emotion against them. Le Blanc's narrative is surely heightened by his desire to prove that the Jesuits had not enjoyed any surreptitious advantage and had their own share of suffering to bear.[58] Yet it is essentially plausible in its details of the Jesuits being pelted with stones, forced into prostration when they passed wats, and subject to the taunts of small children displaying the general hatred towards them.[59] Apparently,

> 'The rumour had been spread that they had been sent by the king of the Christians to destroy the religion of the pagodas to observe the Talapoins [monks] and discredit them. All that was not far from the truth….[60]

In reality, their position was far preferable to that of the Christians they visited in the prisons of Lobpuri, locked into 'cangues' or stocks. Le Blanc's long descriptions of their plight – he even admitted these may bore the reader – confirms in some detail the general observation of other sources that nearly all Christian communities were targeted. Even the captain of the Japanese Christians was placed in slavery.[61] The only group excluded were the Dutch, who may have offered some kind of support to Phetracha.[62] Most of those caught up in the first sweep seem to have been

56 Le Blanc, *History*, 89.

57 Le Blanc, *History*, 90, describes it as house arrest, but they were evidently allowed out and even profited from the protection of their guards. La Touche in Smithies (trans., ed.), *Three Military Accounts*, 72. The anonymous *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo*, in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, 102, suggests that the Jesuits were left alone because they were lodged in one of the king's houses.

58 Le Blanc, *History*, 90-2 much emphasizes the general state of fear they lived in, the threats emanating from the court.

59 Le Blanc, *History*, 68.

60 Le Blanc, *History*, 68. The reference to the 'observation' of the monks indicates, incidentally, a resentment of the Jesuit 'accommodation' practice of residing in the wats etc.

61 Le Blanc, *History,* 105. Otherwise, though, the Japanese are not mentioned as prisoners by the missionary sources. If they were indeed targeted less, it would fit with the conceptualization of 1688 as informed by an 'anti-conversion' sensibility (see below), for there is no record of the Japanese proselytising in Ayutthaya. This is probably also why the Japanese are not identified in a royal decree from 1663 that prohibited sexual liaisons with various monotheist groups. I am grateful to Chris Baker for providing me with this translation of the 1663 decree contained in *Phraratchakamnot kao* [Old Royal Decrees] 37, *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Three Seals Law] Vol 5, (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1994), pp. 98-99.

62 Martineau (12 July 1689, Launay, 204), has it that at first some French officers in Louvo were arrested, then some Europeans, Englishmen, and others from Phaulkon's guard, and then finally they arrested all the Christian Europeans, Indians and others who were found to be in Lobpuri, except the Dutch '*qui ont repoussé le parti*' (who refused to take their side?). This last phrase is unclear; it might mean they refused to be classed as Christians in the way that others were, although the inclusion of Protestant Englishmen complicates that. The question of the support given by the Dutch to the plotters is controversial, but at the very least they were known to be antagonistic towards the French.

Siamese, Peguans, and Portuguese.[63] That it was religious identity per se which was the salient criteria is clear, for example, in the case of an imprisoned Armenian man who had married a Portuguese woman and become a Christian, while his brother, who was Muslim, was left alone.[64] Equally telling is the seminary priest from Manila who mistakenly believed that it was only the French who were being targeted and so changed to layman's clothes, but was arrested nonetheless.[65] The sweep included some English soldiers and girls, who 'although heretics, had been arrested as Christians.'[66]

As Phetracha's grip tightened, Christians across the kingdom were rounded up and dispatched to Lobpuri.[67] A large family of Castilians were dragged up from Ayutthaya.[68] A Franciscan and a lay priest in Phitsanoluk were chased down by a huge number of men.[69] Desfarges reports that the pair had been intimidated since January, which would indicate that in some provinces the anti-Christian mood had been able to reveal itself earlier.[70]

Few of these details make sense in terms of pure realpolitik. To begin with, Phetracha may have feared a cabal between Phaulkon and other Christians, as Le Blanc suggests.[71] But Le Blanc also reports that the general attack on Christianity occurred once this fear was dispelled, once Phaulkon was dead on 5th June and the French threat contained. It is hard to see any serious fifth column fears at work: these mixed-race Portuguese families, their teenaged daughters, Cochinchinese house servants, the Peguan families, were negligible as political agents. It should be appreciated, for example, how tame the 'Portuguese' community was.[72] Indeed, perhaps eager to escape further persecution, the Portuguese based in Ayutthaya presented themselves to fight on the side of the Siamese in the siege of Bangkok![73] The nature of the imprisonment makes more sense if it is seen as reflecting the expenditure of the social energy aroused by the defence of Buddhism in the coup. Evidently there was a flash of anger at the elite level: Beauchamp, one of the French officers arrested alongside Phaulkon in the palace, tells us that that the 'Princess-Queen' had proclaimed

63 Desfarges, *Relation*, 49; La Touche in Smithies (trans., ed.). *Three Military Accounts*, 64, who was taken as prisoner from Mergui to Lobpuri, has it that initially the French were left alone. The anonymous *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo*, in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, 102, has it that Siamese were left alone but Peguans, Portuguese, English, and French Christians were seized, and 'pillaging, profanation, and rape were conducted with impunity.'

64 Le Blanc, *History*, 97-8.

65 Le Blanc, *History*, 104. However when he denied that he was a priest they gave him as a slave to a mandarin.

66 Le Blanc, *History*, 101-2 describes an English girl who is forced to apostatize and 5 or 6 English soldiers who converted to Catholicism in prison.

67 Le Blanc, *History*, 98.

68 Le Blanc, *History*, 100.

69 Le Blanc, *History*, 103-4. We can verify that they were working in Phitsanoluk, from Phaulkon's letter to the Pope of 4 Jan 1688: Bèze, *Mémoire,* 240.

70 Desfarges, *Relation*, 48-9.

71 Le Blanc, *History*, 73.

72 As brought out in Stefan Halikowski Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayuthhaya*, 1640-1720 (Leiden, 2011).

73 Le Blanc, *History*, 131; Bèze, *Mémoire*, 161. Francisco Nogueira, in Smithies (ed.) *Five Hundred Years*, 220, claims that the Portuguese escaped from the start, but this is contradicted by the more detailed evidence of Le Blanc.

loudly that 'all the Christians in the kingdom should be exterminated.'[74] But Le Blanc's description of the symbolic dimensions to the harassment of the Christians accords with other clues regarding popular anti-Christianity. These include the use of bamboo crucifixes to beat down upon a young Frenchman, or tying a crucifix to the soles of the feet of a nun who taught women in the Portuguese camp.[75]

The events of 1688 did not amount to an 'anti-Christian coup' in the sense of a movement whose principal intention was to wipe Ayutthaya clean of the religion. The Dutch were not affected; the Jesuits were allowed to go free; Nogueira claims that the churches in the Portuguese quarter of the capital were not troubled.[76] They were, however, animated by an element of popular antagonism towards Christianity triggered by the threat it was perceived to pose to the hegemonic position of Buddhism. It was, in that sense, shaped by an 'anti-conversion' sensibility. In fact this was so in a very explicit sense according to Le Blanc. He reports that on the 14th June and regularly thereafter, the prisoners were informed that if they would pray at the wats, they would be released. He relates many examples of the threats and inducements offered to make the Christians apostatize – a kind of forced re-conversion.[77]

This did not at all amount to the sudden acquisition of a monotheistic-style attitude towards religious identity.[78] Popular emotions may have been inflamed but they died down quite quickly. After the French departed, it did not take too long for some monks to become friendly again with the few remaining missionaries in prison.[79] And once the threat from the West was shown to be thoroughly extinguished and Phetracha had finally secured his position, they could be released, in April 1691. The missionaries were even allowed to set up their seminary again. At Laneau's funeral in 1696, the monks sent offerings to honour him.[80]

74 Beauchamp's account in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, 64. La Touche in Smithies (trans., ed.). *Three Military Accounts* 64, says that after the death of Pahulkon, Phetracha wanted the complete destruction of all the Christians in the kingdom, and Véret, in Lingat, 'Une lettre de Véret', 349, 352, refers to rumours that all foreigners and Christians were to be massacred.

75 Le Blanc, *History*, 95-6. This reflects the great dishonour attached to the soles of the feet. Note also the treatment of Laneau when he visited Bangkok and had his pectoral cross and episcopal ring snatched away: Le Blanc 80; Desfarges, *Relation*, 40.

76 Nogueira, Smithies ed, *500 Years,* 222.

77 Le Blanc, *History*, 90-1. Clearly, this claim should be treated with some caution given that it would be the 'icing of the cake' of a martyrdom narrative. But it is not implausible in this context. Bèze's narrative also indicates another motive shaping the persecution, which was to create a pool of victims to satiate the sexual appetite of Phetracha's son Sorasek. However, Phetracha disapproved of this: Le Blanc, *History*, 120; Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, 131-2.

78 There is a good analogy to be made with Sri Lankan history over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which resistance to the Portuguese imperial influence was sometimes expressed in anti-Christian terms, without ever altering the long-term nature of Buddhist identity construction. See for eg Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, 212, on Vimaladharmasuriya.

79 Forest, *Missionaires Francais*, III, 369; Pombejra, 'Political History' 452.

80 Bèze, *Mémoire,* Appendix VII; Letter of Poquet 27 December 1696, in Launay, 332.

One way to escape the prison of our French sources and consider how the presence and retreat of European influence was signified in the popular imagination is to consider the temple mural paintings analysed by Maurizio Peleggi.[81] Here I think the theme of religious conflict is clear. The murals at Wat Khongkharam, for example, show European soldiers as making up the demon troops who threatened the Buddha while he meditated: a perfect expression of the way in which the European political threat was conflated with a threat to Buddhism itself.[82] Just as in Japan then, long after the actual threat from Christians was neutered, they lingered in the popular memory as a symbol of dangerous heresy.

CONCLUSION

The French could barely see Buddhist identity in Siam before 1688; they were dazzled by Buddhist tolerance and therefore puzzled by Buddhist intransigence towards conversion. Sometimes scholars today can problematize it almost out of existence. There are indeed good reasons for pointing out that pre-modern Buddhists did not construct boundaries in the way that Christians or even modern Buddhists might do. But there is a risk here of failing to see the hard edge that Buddhism might develop under certain circumstances – and with real political consequences. Buddhism as an 'offensive ideology' is geared to challenge other viewpoints, it has this in common with all other transcendentalisms. It asserts its epistemological superiority over all comers; it had a discourse of the demonic and the heretical to fashion against opponents. Indeed the brief spasm of Siamese persecution in 1688 was foreshadowed in a much more serious manner by the persecutions of Christians in Japan much earlier in the century. But because Buddhism asserts its superiority not through destroying other religious forms in the manner of monotheism but through encompassing and subordinating them, its aggressive guise was not stimulated merely by the presence of missionaries. Rather it snapped into action when Buddhism itself seemed genuinely under threat. Nothing could be more of a threat than the conversion of the king himself – the king who as *cakkavati* had the righteous responsibility of above all safeguarding the *dhamma*, the *sasana*, the *sangha*.

How much the sangha's role in ushering the people of Lobpuri and Ayutthaya onto the stage of history really matters, and whether 1688 shows any hint of the 'early modern' forces discernible elsewhere in the world – these questions must be left, in the end, to regional experts and historians of Thailand. But what are the implications of these events for the comparative project of comprehending global ruler conversions? What is on display here is the mobilization of a typical transcendentalist relationship between king and clerisy. This ultimately rendered Buddhist kingship – and particularly Theravada kingship – more resilient to the advance of Christianity and Islam than the forms of divinized kingship established by purely immanentist cultures could be in themselves. In that, I think, lies a clue as to why the religious map of the world today looks the way it does.

81 Maurizio Peleggi**, '**The Turbaned and the Hatted: Figures of Alterity in Early Modern Thai Visual Culture', in In Anja Eisenbeiss & Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch (eds.), *Images of Otherness in Medieval and Early Modern Times: Exclusion, Inclusion and Assimilation* (Berlin, 2012), 61-2, which also discusses an intriguing cabinet from the late 17th /early 18th century that may represent the Safavid Shah who had attempted to convert Narai.

82 No Na Paknam, *Wat Khongkharam. Mural Paintings of Thailand Series* (Bangkok, Muang Boran Publishing House, 1994.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tokyo Bunko MS 48, 77.

Alberts, Tara, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2013).

Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam in the Early Modern World* (CUP, 2017)

Bèze, Claude de, *Mémoire du Pere de Beze sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon, premier minister du roi de Siam Phra Narai et sa triste fin*, ed. Jean Drans and Henri Bernard (Tokyo, 1947)

Chaumont, Alexandre de, *Relation de l'ambassade de Mr. le Chevalier de Chaumont à la cour du roi de Siam, et ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable durant son voyage* (Paris: Seneuze & Horthnels, 1986).

Choisy, François-Timoléon de. *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686*. (Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1687)

Desfarges N., *Relation des revolutions arrivées a Siam dans l'année 1688* (Amsterdam, 1691)

Eisenstadt, Shmuel, *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Civilization* (Albany, 1986

Forest, Alain, *Les missionaires francais au Tonkin at au Siam (XVIIe-XVIIe siècles)*. *Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un échec total*, 3 vols (Paris, 1998),

Gellner, Ernest, 'Notes towards a theory of ideology,' in *Spectacles and Predicaments* (Cambridge, 1979)

Gervaise, Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle et politique du Royaume du Siam (Paris, 1688)*

Gunawardana, R. A. L. H. *Robe and Plough*: *Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson, 1979

Kaempfer, Engelbert, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690* (Bangkok, 1998)

La Loubère¸ Simon de, *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère "Du Royaume de Siam", ed.* Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h *(Paris, 1987)*

Launay, Adrien (ed.), *Histoire de la Mission de Siam. Documents historiques*, 2 vols (Paris, 1920), Vol I.

Lingat, Robert, 'Une lettre de Véret sur la révolution siamoise de 1688' *T'oung Pao* 31, (1935)

Moin, A. Azfar, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, (Columbia, 2012)

Paknam, No Na, *Wat Khongkharam. Mural Paintings of Thailand Series* (Bangkok, Muang Boran Publishing House, 1994).

Peleggi**,** Maurizio **, '**The Turbaned and the Hatted: Figures of Alterity in Early Modern Thai Visual Culture', in In Anja Eisenbeiss & Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch (eds.), *Images of Otherness in Medieval and Early Modern Times: Exclusion, Inclusion and Assimilation* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012

Phraratchakamnot kao [Old Royal Decrees] 37, *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Three Seals Law] Vol 5, (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1994

Pombejra, Dhiravat na 'A Political History of Siam Under the Prasatthong Dynasty: 1629-1688' (PhD. Thesis, University of London, 1994)

Muhammad *Rabi, Ibn Muhammad* Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, translated from the Persian by John O'Kane (London: Routledge &Kegan Paul, 1972

Smith, Stefan Halikowski, *Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayuthhaya*, 1640-1720 (Leiden, 2011).

Smithies, Michael (trans., ed.). *Three Military Accounts of the 1688 'Revolution' in Siam* (Bangkok, 2002)

Ruangsilp, Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom,ca. 1604-1765* (Leiden, Boston, 2007)

Michael, Smithies, *A Resounding Failure, Martin and the French in Siam, 1672-1693* (Chiang Mai, 1998)

Smithies, Michael (ed.) *Five Hundred Years of Thai-Portuguese Relations: A Festschrift* (Bangkok, 2011)

Skocpol Theda, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge 1979).

Tachard, Guy, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites Envoyez par le Roy aux Indes & à la Chine: avex leurs Observations, Astronomiques, et leurs Remarques de Physique, de Géographie, d'Hydrographie, & d'Histoire* (Paris: Seneuze and Horthnels 1686).

Van der Cruysse, Dirk *Siam and the West, 1500-1700*, translated by Michael Smithies (Chiang-Mai, 2002).

Vollant des Verquains, Jean, *Histoire de la révolution de Siam arrivée en l'année 1688* (Lille 1691)