

Leonor de Seabra, *The Embassy of Pero Vaz de Siqueira to Siam (1684–1686)*. Documents transcribed from the Historical Archives of Goa, translated by Custódio Cavaco Martins, Mário Pinharanda Nunes and Alan Norman Baxter. Macau, University of Macau Press, 2005, 400 pp., ISBN 9993726583.

Anyone who has read about Thai history in the 1680s will be familiar with the two embassies sent by King Louis XIV of France to the court of King Narai. Alexandre de Chaumont arrived as ambassador in 1685 and was followed by Simon de La Loubère in 1687. They were preceded in 1685 by the embassy sent by Shah Sulaiman of Persia. The first of the grand embassies, however, represented the King of Portugal, and until recently, very few details about this mission have been published.

While Leonor de Seabra was conducting research in the archives of Goa, for a master's thesis on Portuguese–Thai relations, an unpublished manuscript came to her attention. It had been described in Charles Boxer's 1950 inventory of manuscripts in Goa (in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14: 308), but had never been published and apparently never even cited by historians of Thailand. She transcribed the manuscript (the official report of the 1684 Portuguese embassy to the court of King Narai), together with numerous contemporary documents concerning the Portuguese embassy and the embassy that King

Narai attempted unsuccessfully to send to Lisbon during 1685–6. This collection of documents was published by the University of Macau Press in 2003 with the title *A Embaixada ao Sião de Pero Vaz de Siqueira (1684–1686)*. In 2005 the same press issued a translation of the book in English.

Ambassador Siqueira was a well-to-do trader of Macau, appointed by the Portuguese viceroy at Goa for a special mission to the court of King Narai. He reached Paknam the last week of March 1684 and stayed in Ayutthaya and Lopburi from April to June. During this period, King Narai was residing at his new palace at Lopburi, still partly under construction (and described in detail in these documents). He received the ambassador there in a formal audience in May and gave a glittering night-time audience in June for the leave-taking.

The main text in this publication is a long report that describes the events of the mission, starting with Siqueira's ceremonial departure from Macau in March 1684. The extant copy of the manuscript ends with the leave-taking audience and return to Ayutthaya. The remainder of the report has not been located, but fortunately for historians, it contained only the details of the departure from Ayutthaya in July 1684 and return to Macau. This report, which accounts for about two-thirds of the documentation in the book, was compiled not by Siqueira but by the secretary of the embassy, Francisco Frago. So.

To supplement Frago's report, Seabra has added other Portuguese

documents concerning plans for the embassy in 1682–3, the viceroy's 1683 instructions to Siqueira and letters written to the viceroy by Siqueira and by Portuguese residents of Ayutthaya. Several appended documents are concerned with the three Thai ambassadors who arrived in Goa in April 1685 on a Thai ship. Their continuing adventures are not mentioned in this book; they sailed in 1686 on a Portuguese ship, which was bound for Lisbon but was wrecked at the southern tip of Africa, and from there, they returned home with Dutch assistance (see *A Siamese Embassy Lost in Africa, 1686*, edited by Michael Smithies, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999). A few appended documents of much later date are concerned with Siqueira's family and his estate.

Unlike the well-known books by Alexandre de Chaumont, Simon de La Loubère and others involved in the French embassies of this period, these Portuguese texts were not intended for publication and do not attempt a general description of the kingdom. Instead, they provide insiders' views from the Portuguese perspective and record confidential proposals that were withheld even from the Thai negotiators only until near the end of Siqueira's visit. The mission could be called a failure, because none of its true objectives was accomplished.

The viceroy's confidential instructions to Siqueira are on pages 350–8, near the end of the volume. Readers ought to see them before reading the Fragoso account. Officials in Goa were

convinced that the French bishops, who first arrived in Asia only two decades earlier, were the vanguard of French commercial interests and that they would pave the way for the French trading company to move into key positions in mainland Southeast Asia and onward into China, thereby robbing the Portuguese of their markets. The viceroy's foremost wish, therefore, was to persuade King Narai to expel the French bishop and missionaries. The impossibility of this plan became apparent to Siqueira immediately after consulting the leaders of the Portuguese community, including the highest-ranking Catholic priest at Ayutthaya. King Narai had already sent a formal embassy to France, which in fact was lost at sea; he sought the advice of the French bishop regularly; and there was no justifiable reason to expel people who had committed no wrong in Thai eyes.

Siqueira was unable to propose the expulsion, and his accomplishments were reduced to three points: reaffirming the long-time friendship between the Portuguese and Thai kings, thanking King Narai for his kind treatment of the Portuguese who resided in his kingdom, and asking the king to prevent the French missionaries and bishops from troubling the Portuguese residents. These were the points officially stated in the viceroy's letter to the king, and so the mission was a resounding success, when measured by those criteria in the Fragoso report.

Of greater interest to general readers and historians is the wealth of detail

provided throughout the account by Fragoso, even though intended for only the viceroy and a few other officials in Goa. He took great care in his descriptions of meetings with high officials, the royal audiences, an informal elephant round-up with King Narai and other ceremonial occasions, as a means of recording the unprecedented honours shown to the ambassador and stressing Siqueira's great diplomatic accomplishments. Letters to the viceroy from independent sources in Ayutthaya (among Seabra's appended documents) are less enthusiastic, reveal some of Siqueira's shortcomings and express doubt that any practical agreements had been reached. Nevertheless, from the superficial diplomatic perspective, the embassy was carried out with great pomp and ceremony, the friendliest gestures were made by both sides and Siqueira sailed away, leaving Thai-Portuguese relations in a momentarily refreshed state.

The text reveals an obsession with details of protocol for the formal audiences. Siqueira had strict orders from the viceroy to insist on European customs, which were adopted by the king for the first time and paved the way for the French ambassadors who arrived soon after. Although Siqueira was allowed to wear his shoes, the Thai officials managed to get their way, too. They removed his dusty boots, when he sat down momentarily, just before he was admitted to the throne room, and exchanged them for a fresh, newly made pair, which would not soil the exquisitely carpeted throne hall.

Biographers of Constantine Phaulkon, a unique actor on the Thai diplomatic stage in the 1680s, will find many new details about him in these documents, and will perhaps gain a few more insights into his character and the roles he played behind the scenes in government. The great caution with which he was treated by the Portuguese is a reflection not only of his domination in the ceremonial aspects of diplomacy but also fear of his power and influence over King Narai. The Macanese were already aware in 1683 of Phaulkon's influence at court, but Siqueira did not learn, until he arrived, the extent to which Phaulkon had taken charge of all diplomatic relations and maritime trade in his rapid rise to power.

Readers will find it difficult to navigate through this book, because the introductory documents have all been placed near the end of the volume, and there is no introduction to the Siqueira mission. Instead, the author-transcriber provides a brief biography of Siqueira (who was born in Macau, married into a well-to-do merchant family and died there in 1703), a description of Macau in the seventeenth century and an abbreviated history from the founding of Ayutthaya to the founding of Bangkok, with highlights of Portuguese-Thai relations. These essays can be read in any order, as they do not comment on the embassy or the transcriptions. The appended documents from the archives in Portugal (in particular the viceroy's instructions) provide a helpful introduction to the mission and its purposes, and are the best starting point for the reader.

Forty-five manuscripts are included, eighteen of which are short letters or messages incorporated by Fragoso into his descriptive report. In most letters, the writer's name appears at the end, but the addressee's identity can be ascertained only by internal evidence in the text, plus a little guesswork. An identification at the beginning of each document by a subject header ought to have been added, together with a table of contents to identify the individual texts.

The annotations in the 2003 Portuguese edition are concerned with the poor condition of the manuscript. They have been omitted in the English edition, leaving almost no annotations to guide the reader. Most of the Portuguese individuals mentioned in the Fragoso account are identified somewhere or other in this collection of documents, but there is no index to assist readers in this respect. A biographical glossary to identify at least the main characters would have been very helpful, especially for individuals who are frequently mentioned not by name but by title.

The book contains many details about social organisation and institutions common to Portuguese settlements in Asia. Among them are the head of community (appointed by the viceroy in Goa), another official (likewise appointed by the viceroy) responsible for the affairs of resident-traders while they were away on trading ventures, the administration of Portuguese civil justice to Portuguese nationals residing in Ayutthaya, the provident fund for orphans of deceased Portuguese and the local ecclesiastical

hierarchy. Some of the appended letters reveal the multiple (and independent) channels through which the vice-regal court in Goa received information about Thai affairs and was able to evaluate reports such as Fragoso's. The Portuguese community in Ayutthaya has not been studied extensively, even though it may have been as populous as the one at Macau, and these documents provide much information about this subject that will be useful to historians of Thailand.

Kennon Breazeale

---