Sacred Kingship under King Narai of Ayutthaya: Divinisation and Righteousness

Alan Strathern
University of Oxford

Abstract—This article analyses the system of sacred monarchy that maintained during the reign of King Narai of Ayutthaya (r. 1656-1688) in terms of a set of concepts designed to elucidate the relationship between religion and politics more generally in the pre-modern world. It argues that Ayutthayan kingship was unusually intensively sacralised in terms of two quite different modes simultaneously, the *divinised* and the *righteous*. These modes, both in themselves and in conjunction, produced somewhat paradoxical effects as well as forms of authority. The article thereby adopts a global perspective on Ayutthaya kingship while also offering some thoughts as to how and why it developed in the way it did and how Narai strove to manage the consequences.

Of all the great monarchies of the early modern world, the position occupied by King Narai (reigned 1656-1688) at Ayutthaya stands out for the sheer intensity of its sacralisation. Even envoys issuing from the hardly self-effacing courts of Louis XIV (reigned 1643-1715) of France and Shah Suleiman I (reigned 1666-1694) of Persia (Iran) in the 1680s – and imbued with the particular arrogance of proselytising enthusiasm – were rendered rather awestruck. The affairs surrounding these embassies have received much excellent scholarly attention.[1] The purpose of this article is to analyse what we know of the functioning of sacred kingship in this period in terms of a comparative theoretical framework – one which is designed to understand how religion and politics interrelated much more broadly in the premodern world.[2] In this way what is properly distinctive about Ayutthaya kingship will be set off in sharper relief, and its inherent tensions and contradictions brought to the surface. Ultimately, these reflections also help us to understand the background against which Narai would deal with the French and Persian missions – although this must be demonstrated elsewhere.[3] Here it will be suggested that the Thai monarchy exhibited an emphatic sacralisation in two modes of sacralisation simultaneously, which may referred to as the *divinised* and the *righteous*. What powers did this lend the occupant of the throne – and with what problems was he thereby afflicted?

[1] See most recently, Baker and Pasuk 2017a; Dhiravat 1984; Van der Cruysse 2002; Kemp 1969; and Forest 1998.

[2] See Strathern 2019.

[3] Strathern forthcoming b.

Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 107, Pt. 1, 2019, pp. 49–77

A very brief theoretical introduction

A number of theoretical terms deployed in this article require some preliminary comments, although these will have to be very brief; readers who wish a deeper understanding of how they are defined and defended may turn to my recent book, *Unearthly Powers*, where they are set out in detail.[4] The approach is broadly influenced by the literature on the 'Axial Age', which refers to the ideological revolutions of first millennium BCE West Asia, Greece, India and China.[5] In religious terms, these gave rise to 'transcendentalism', which may be understood as an essential element of monotheistic and Indic religions, especially Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism.

Transcendentalism is distinguished by an orientation towards liberation into an ineffable future state of being representing the highest end of man. The attainment of this salvation is associated with submitting to universal truth claims, which it is understood that others will wrongly reject. It is also closely associated with the imperative to live according to a set of universal ethical principles, which function as a guide to the interior reconstruction of the self. So: soteriology, epistemology, morality, interiority. Transcendentalism entails a canonisation of sacred texts and the attempt to curtail revelation. And it creates clerical elites who evolve unusually strong institutional traditions; they preserve a distinct autonomy from the state while claiming the right to ethical arbitration over it.

Transcendentalism may be distinguished from an even broader, indeed universal form of religiosity, which is referred to here as 'immanentism.' This is defined by the attempt to call upon a 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 ancestors, spirits, deities.[6] Immediately, it must be underlined that even when a transcendentalist tradition acquires a certain dominance, immanentism never goes away. 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 magical powers. Deeply rooted cognitive and emotional proclivities lie behind this dynamic.

These two modes also correspond to two different ways of sacralising and imagining kingship. The immanentist mode is *divinised kingship*: the ruler is pushed into contiguity or equivalence with the gods, and thereby granted unusual powers to thwart or enhance the worldly well-being of their subjects. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, gives rise to *righteous kingship*, whereby kings become guardians of a system of truth-ethics-salvation. In themselves, they may be mortal and human; but their responsibility is theoretically immense. Here it is the amoral or immoral dimension to political rule that must be effaced. The ruler is thereby able to draw upon a powerful discourse of his own exquisite legitimacy – and yet must also contend with a clerisy (Church, ulema, sangha) retaining tremendous moral authority.

[4] I have outlined ten distinguishing features of immanentism and fifteen of transcendentalism in Strathern 2019.

[5] See, for example, Eisenstadt 1986.

[6] Sahlins and Graeber 2017.

Once again, the two modes were often combined, particularly in South, Southeast and East Asia. (The monotheistic traditions tended to resist the divinised mode more stubbornly, albeit far from comprehensively; indeed, the early modern period saw Islam pushed as far as it would go towards divinisation in the shape of Safavid and Mughal kingship.)[7] Divinised Kingship may, in turn, be broken down into two subtypes. The *heroic* form depends on the revelation of charisma, especially through achieving unusual success, archetypically in battle. It therefore allows a relatively free public enactment, although to the extent that it is contingent on such successes it is rather unstable. The *cosmic* form is achieved above all through the ritualization and concealment of the king's physical and biological presence: his humanity and mortality are effaced so that he may become a reliable intercessor with the gods. Rather often, one may observe some sort of evolution from the heroic to the cosmic over the course of a life cycle of a dynasty. This, however, precipitated another potential problem: the ritualization trap, by which other elite players detached the ruler from the levers of executive power by bundling him into ceremonial isolation.

The king as Buddhist virtuoso

The courts of mainland Southeast Asia had long participated in the Sanskrit 'cosmopolis', drawing on Indic models of literature and ritual for the glamorization of kingship – but these had become subordinated to Theravada Buddhist paramountcy.[8] Brahmanic Hinduism was thereby stripped of its universalist and soteriological qualities and rendered a tool of immanentist power. Brahmans were accorded an important, but limited, role in the maintenance of certain ritual, astrological and administrative technologies of state. In fact, both Buddhism and Brahmanism furnished images of divinised kingship bursting with immanent power, but it was left to Buddhism to establish the fundamental discourse of the righteous king.[9]

That discourse may have been first mobilised with urgency as part of the dynamic whereby the Thai broke away from the model of rule developed at Angkor to the east from the 12th century. Angkor had borrowed heavily from Indic and Mahayana Buddhist traditions in order to associate the king with the Hindu gods and later the bodhisattva Lokeśvara.[10] This was an ideological strategy of status distinction par excellence, one that insisted on the ruler's unique qualities in order to overawe regional elites and justify a highly stratified society. But then, as Peter Gyallay-Pap puts it:

[7] Moin 2012.

[8] Pollock 2006.

[9] To speak of a 'Buddhist' discourse of kingship and a 'Brahmanic' one is to use etic categories rather than to describe emic sensations or discrete realities. However, see Duncan 1990 for tension between Aśokan and Sakran models of kingship, and Strathern 2007: 149-51 for the play of Indic divinising tendencies and Buddhist contractualism in Lankan kingship. In the case of the Thai kingdoms over the long term, it is possible to see a constant dialogue or cycling between a transcendentalist-ethical-communal-legitimising understanding of kingship versus an immanentist-power oriented-elite distinction tendency.

[10] See below, and Kulke 1993: 375; Tambiah 1976: 98-101. Jayavarman VII's reign could be seen as an attempt to turn Angkor towards Buddhist community ethics: Sharrock 2009.

> If the Hindu-Mahayana Buddhist symbolisms were court-centred and did not penetrate in palpable ways to the village level, Theravada Buddhism as a religion of the people extended the goals of the state by providing for the redemption of humanity. It sought to transcend the inequality of an attenuated caste-based system by evoking the concept of a quasi-egalitarian community in the symbol of the sangha. It was in this sense revolutionary…[11]

Local Thai rulers did not muster authority simply by imitating the imagery of the rulers of Angkor, then, but by deploying a different strategy of legitimation, one that emphasised the creation of a coherent moral community as much as the blunt assertion of innate superiority. This new vision was embodied in a model of Buddhism much influenced by developments in Sri Lanka, which allowed the community to be imagined and organised through its relationship with the sangha and the *dhamma*. The ruler was thus subordinated to the service of higher imperatives and ethical norms, but also empowered to resist and heave over the massive boulder of Angkorean divinised rulership.[12] This was the king as the lord of the *dhamma*, already described in the Pali scriptures. In the *Angutttara Nikaya*: "Herein, monk, the rajah, the wheel roller, the Dhamma man, the Dhamma raja, relies just on Dhamma, honours Dhamma, reveres Dhamma,…"[13]

"Dhamma" encompasses righteousness, the Buddhist teachings, the cosmic law they reveal, and "beyond that again, the truth that transcends all historical and empirical realities, nirvana."[14] In a poem written in the later 15th century to commemorate the 'Defeat of Lanna' (*Yuan Phai*) and eulogise Boromma Trailokanat (reigned 1448-1488), we see that kingship is now firmly associated with making "the Triple Gem [Buddha, dhamma and sangha] bestride the world."[15] The *dhammaraja* conception established the king as an embodiment of almost monastic standards of morality encoded in the list of ten royal virtues.[16] In ideal terms, then, kings were beings who not only provided the conditions under which the soteriological quest may proceed, but illustrated what the end product of that quest should look like.[17] They were, indeed, persons who had accumulated vast stores of merit, which is what had enabled them to be reborn as a king in the first place. Thus, the Palace Chronicle of Ayutthaya announces that Narai had acceded to the throne – that is, gained victory over his adversary – "with the holy power of His constant condition of accumulated merit."[18]

This is all strikingly transcendentalist, but note that the ethical comportment of the king was connected to the ability to establish the conditions for this-worldly flourishing

[11] Gyallay-Pap 2007: 77.

[12] Wyatt 2001b; Charnvit 1976: 135-6.

[13] Quoted in Tambiah 1976: 40. Also see Ishii 1986: 151.

[14] Tambiah 1976: 41.

[15] Baker and Pasuk 2017b: 17. I am grateful to Chris Baker for providing me with a translation of this poem.

[16] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 248-9. See Tambiah 1976: 96 on Buddhism as an ethical restraint on power.

[17] Wyatt 1982: 10; Forest 1998, I: 152.

[18] *RCA*: 232.

in ways that bring us close to the image of cosmic kingship.[19] Hence, Narai is praised in the palace chronicles not just for defending the realm and administering justice, but also because "the rains accordingly fell in proper sequence with the seasons, food cereals were accordingly abundant throughout the regions of the countryside."[20] The thinking behind this is disclosed in a poem that has been credited to Narai himself, the 'Long Song Prophecy', foretelling the fall of his own kingdom. (In fact it was more likely composed much later by elites trying to explain Ayutthaya's defeat and devastation at the hands of the Burmese in 1767).[21] In Richard Cushman's translation:

> Then it shall pass that perils will arise
> To compromise all creatures with new fears
> When virtues ten fall deaf on kingly ears
> So smash the spheres, sixteen disasters smite
>
> The moon, the stars, the earth, and yea, the sky
> Are knocked awry – in every realm the blight
> While accidents and portents stun the sight
> The clouds flame-bright with world-devouring blaze
> …
> A lion's roar is now no more the king's
> No longer rings the country's fame. Confusion
> Spreads – gives birth to treason, lies, delusion
> Into seclusion Holy Faith retreats.[22]

The point to note is the conflation of macrocosm (the natural, political and social order) with the microcosm of the king's being, and the conflation of soteriological and worldly fortune. For the dhamma itself withers: "The rays of all Three Gems at last go out." All this begins in the king's virtue – or lack of it.

There was, moreover, a constant tendency to equate the figure of the Buddha with the figure of the king. In the sutras, the pair looked after complementary domains or 'wheels' of activity: the *cakkavatti*, a world-ruling monarch, turned the wheel of dominion and the bodhisattva turned the wheel of morality.[23] Although this distinction nicely encapsulates the ontological breach typical of transcendentalism, the texts also strive to close that breach in certain ways. The Buddha is compared with the *cakkavatti* at several places and is reported as having been one in a previous lifetime; they both share the thirty-two bodily signs of the great man.[24] There was then a close equation between the status of a *cakkavatti* and that of a bodhisattva. (In the Theravada tradition

[19] See Strathern 2019: Chapter 3 on this as a structure across South, East and Southeast Asia.

[20] *RCA:* 309.

[21] See Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 248; Wyatt 1982: 11 is more inclined to accept a composition date around Narai's time. Compare also Skilling 2007: 193.

[22] Cushman and Wyatt 2001: verses 7, 8, 10.

[23] Gokhale 1966: 22.

[24] Tambiah 1976: 41-44, 96; Skilling 2007: 193, Gyallay-Pap 2007: 78.

a bodhisattva was a Buddha-to-be).[25] A eulogy of Prasat Thong (reigned 1629-1656) referred to him as a specific bodhisattva, the elephant who had looked after Buddha in the tenth year of his awakening and was destined to be the Buddha Sumangala.[26]

Royal blood mattered in Thai royal succession, but could certainly be trumped by the possession of merit.[27] This was "not merely an apt metaphor but a primary fact of life, encountered every day", as Gesick puts it, and one that placed everyone on their mettle.[28] For how to verify who possessed the greater fund of it? Ultimately, there was little option but simply to acclaim whomever seized power.[29] While the principle of merit wrote an element of ethicised contractualism into the status of the king, it also followed faithfully where the dirty stuff of politics led. It translated raw charisma into ideology in a very immediate way that threatened to trump its routinised forms. Simon de la Loubère grasped that in this sense merit was genuinely analogous to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven and, we may add, to Hawaiian *mana*, or even the Christian notion of Providence too.[30]

The doctrine of merit not only reflected, but surely drove, the tumult of succession crises, and it meant that even kings *in situ* could not rest on their laurels, however much karmic progress they made by building new temples or conducting elaborate Buddhist rites. Officials, lesser princes, neighbouring potentates or 'men of merit' moving in from the provinces could show their superior suitability to reign simply by waging war successfully. Theravada Buddhism had not ultimately provided a means of condensing all access to either immanent power or transcendentalist authority in the person of the king: rivals could tap into these resources through special ascetic practices or the demonstration of prowess.[31] The logic of merit provided a cultural underpinning to the operation of the 'galactic' or 'solar' form of polity, in which subordinates in peripheral bases routinely make a bid for centrality. Thus, the paradox noted by Stanley Tambiah of the conjunction of divine kingship with perennial rebellion and royal assassination.[32] Thus, the paradox of kings avowing the most emphatic discourses of moral righteousness while fighting the most devastating wars.[33]

After the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, and the actual end of dynasty, all the more weight was thrown onto merit as a principle of validation. The fightback was led by a minor provincial official of Sino-Siamese parentage by the name of Taksin, who

[25] Tambiah 1976: 39.

[26] Skilling 2007: 189. The long list of Narai's titles in *RCA*: 233 includes a claim to be a bodhisattva.

[27] Loubère 1987: 238; Gesick 1983: 97. I am grateful to Chris Baker for pointing out to me that there was no term in the Thai texts for 'usurper', and also to John Smith (personal communication 8 February 2017) for his discussion of the role of royal genealogy and the bilateral succession system in Ayutthaya.

[28] Gesick 1983: 88. Compare Tachard 1686: 385. See also Kemp 1969: 44; Forest 1998, I: 152; and Reynolds 2006: 162.

[29] Phra Fang (see below) wins an initial victory over Taksin and imagines that his own merit must be vast; but when he dies of a coughing fit, such claims lose all cogency.

[30] Loubère 1987: 356.

[31] Gesick 1983: 88; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 210.

[32] Tambiah 1976: 121-2, 482. European observers could be puzzled by the capacity of the Thai to shed the blood of such deeply sacralised kings: Loubère 1987: 238.

[33] Gesick 1983: 91.

recouped all the old Ayutthaya lands from his new base of Thonburi and expanded his authority even further afield.[34] Lacking the legitimacy provided by royal blood, Taksin stands as the classic type of charismatic war-leader whose unusual successes on the battlefield produces both popular acclamation and personal sensations of invincibility.[35] This is precisely the situation in which one would expect innovative claims to personal divinity to emerge alongside attempts to assert an unusual control of the religious field – as *Unearthly Powers* argues.[36]

Taksin had played the role of the good Buddhist ruler rather well during his ascent and had capitalised on the theme of the moral bankruptcy of Ayutthaya in order to assert his own meritorious claims. But as his power grew so did his ambitions over the sacred sphere. In a letter to his next target, the ruler of Vientiane, in 1775, he announced his *cakkavatti* status in a very literal manner; he announced that he had the twelve marks of the *cakkavatti*; he claimed to be a *sotāpanna,* or stream winner, well on the way to *nibbana*; and according to a European report he hoped that his ascetic practices would give him the white blood of the gods and grew irritated at Christian priests who would not concede that he could fly.[37] He also asked monks to venerate him when we was in the *samadhi* pose, flogged those who resisted and demoted monastic hierarchs who refused to accept his supreme authority over the sangha. The monkhood was split, elite opinion was scandalised and he was deposed. Perhaps the very literal way in which he claimed both spiritual distinction and supernatural powers had grated, but it was surely his attempt to overthrow the balance between transcendentalist clergy and secular authority that told for him: he had tried to turn both wheels at the same time.[38]

There is a further reason why he may have been induced to take these steps. As elsewhere, transcendentalist clerisies were liable to move into the vacuum created by the collapse of princely power: a millenarian Buddhist movement led by a hierarch of the northern sangha, Phra Fang had turned monks into troops, swapping their robes to red, and seized Phitsanulok in 1770.[39] Taksin had crushed this movement, just as Oda Nobunaga had crushed millenarian Buddhists in 16th century Japan – and also just like Nobunaga had likely concluded that he must harness the social energy of such movements and tie them to his own person.[40] (In each case secular power only transgresses so firmly onto the realm of the religious order after the religious order has transgressed so explicitly onto the secular…)

Taksin's project of self-divinisation is notable for how purely it remained within

[34] On Taksin, see Wyatt 1982:13-16; Tambiah 1976: 184; Gesick 1983: 87-106; and Forest 1998, I: 153, 424.

[35] Gesick 1983: 93. His military success led him to be acclaimed as a *phumibun*, one who has merit: "seeing the miraculous powers of his merit, all his soldiers extolled him as one worthy to be a king."

[36] Strathern 2019: Chapter 3.

[37] Father Condé *Lettre Êdifiantes* Vol. XXV (1783), 390-40, extract translated in Bowring 1857, I: 369; Gesick 1983: 100; and Reynolds 2006: 144.

[38] Perhaps, too, his charisma started to dissipate following military set-backs: Father Condé in Bowring 157, I: 365: "but his presence, which had once been so powerful to animate the soldiery, had no effect… the town was taken and sacked: the King himself appeared to lose courage. Up to that time he had always been victorious."

[39] Gesick 1983: 94.

[40] See Strathern 2019. Tambiah 1976: 184 describes Taksin producing a schism in this way as an 'unexpected sequel' to his crushing of Phra Fang, but it makes much sense in comparative terms.

the field of Buddhist discourse. Baker and Pasuk have suggested that in the aftermath of 1767, the Thai nobility had clung to the *dhammarāja* vision of kingship, in which the king is an ethical figure responsive to the community rather than a glory-hunting divinity.[41] In that sense, it laid the groundwork for the ideology of the early Bangkok period described by Nidhi Eoseewong in which the state exists only to serve as a ladder for people to accumulate merit, and kings who fail to nurture Buddhism jeopardised their right to rule.[42] But this only represented a thickening of a core strand of Thai kingship, a profoundly transcendentalist principle visible in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya too, that kept the king in his place even as it exalted him, and preserved above all the sangha's claim to soteriological pre-eminence.[43]

The king as divinity

It is no coincidence then that all Theravada kingdoms have supplemented the Buddhist tradition with a Brahmanic courtly culture that divinised the king in a more explicit and unqualified manner. In South Asian Hinduism proper, the Brahman could take on a position of transcendent superiority vis-à-vis the king.[44] But this role seems to have been essentially excised out of the Sanskrit cultural package as it was adopted by Theravada courts, who of course reserved that status for the sangha.[45] The Brahmans were required to communicate with the gods of the Indic pantheon and construct a series of parallels between the earthly and heavenly domains: a crucial but essentially this-worldly enterprise in the mode of cosmic kingship.[46] They were, in a sense, converted to Buddhism. For example, a eulogy to Narai by one of his Brahmans is almost entirely conducted within the standard terms of Indic language and mythology, beginning with a homage to Śiva and ending with prayers beseeching many specific gods to enhance the resplendent power of Narai – and yet there are also clues testifying to an unproblematic acknowledgement of the Buddhist framework.[47]

---

[41] This would be visible in the testimonies of the Ayutthaya prisoners taken to Burma in 1767 (Tun Aung Chain 2005) and *The Long Song Prophecy* quoted above (Cushman and Wyatt 2001). Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 248-52.

[42] Nidhi 2005: 310-11.

[43] Wyatt 1982: 15 suggests that the case indicates that "popular opinion still demanded that the king remain a secular and moral, rather than a religious figure", which presumably goes too far given that Bangkok kingship also played upon Brahmanic and divinising associations. It may also be that the ructions of the 18th century had somehow altered the sensibility of the politically-relevant population, emphasising the *dhammarāja* over the *devarāja*.

[44] Dumont 1980. This position has been challenged, of course, by those emphasising the sacral status and dominance of the king, as in Quigley 1993, and was in any case temporally and spatially variable. Warrior kingdoms in the south of India, for example, were less beholden to the transcendent superiority of the Brahman.

[45] See Tambiah 1976: 83. Skilling 2007 emphasises the importance of Brahmanism in many areas to the Ayutthaya court, to the extent that we should see the religious field as pluralist rather than simply 'Buddhist'. Indeed: such pluralism is, in fact, evident in *any* religious culture influenced by Buddhism. At the same time, Skilling acknowledges (201) that "the brahmanical texts and rites we know today are for the most part subordinated to Buddhism" and wonders when this occurred.

[46] On the role of Brahmans, see Baker and Pasuk 2016: 10-11, 70-2.

[47] Dhiravat 2015: 66.

From the start, Ayutthaya seems to have been distinguished from other early Thai kingdoms by its adoption of elements of Khmer rulership and recruitment of Khmerised elites, probably reinforced by the return of a military expedition to Angkor in 1431-2.[48] Narai claimed descent from the kings of Angkor.[49] His assumed forbears had been associated with deities in intimate ways. The inscriptions from Angkor contain allusions to the king possessing a 'subtle inner self' that was understood as being a 'portion' of the god Śiva. This was imagined as located in a transportable *linga* that acted as a central node for the massing of immanent power. Following Hermann Kulke's work, it is now considered misleading to take the concept of the *devarāja* (god-king) as referring to the king himself: what it did actually refer to is a matter of ongoing debate.[50] But for our purposes, we may note that in Kulke's interpretation the king is equated with Śiva on the level of a metaperson, and this metaperson is concretised within a cult object that is credited with fundamental powers of worldly flourishing: we are far into the territory of the divinised king.[51] Under Jayavarman VII (who also oversaw a major Buddhicisation of the royal cult), inscriptions refer to the king as being fashioned by Brahma from a half of Śiva and a half of Viṣṇu, or of Brahma taking the immanent power (*sakti*) from Śiva and giving it to the king.[52]

This finds a distinct echo in the ritual of coronation or consecration (*abhiṣeka*) undergone by the kings of Ayutthaya. In describing the anointment of Narai at the hands of his Brahmans in October 1656, the Ayutthaya chronicle refers to a long list of titles, including 'Manifestation of the Eleven Dreaded ones.'[53] The name of Narai's predecessor but one, King Ekathotsarot (reigned 1605-1610/11), is also a reference to these beings, who were, in fact, the Hindu trinity and the eight guardians of the cardinal and subcardinal directions.[54] At the consecration of Ekathotsarot, the chronicle says that these "gods of creation, preservation and destruction – extensive, pure and supreme – were unceasingly manifested in His Highness…" Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit have noticed that the same idea is present in the late 15th century *Defeat of Lanna*, the preamble to which says:

---

[48] Wyatt 2001a: 60-1; Ishii 1986: 151-2; Charnvit 1976: 135, footnote 40 distinguishing open Sukhothai kingship from mystified Angkor-influenced Ayutthayan kingship; and Kemp 1969: 33. Skilling 2007: 199 is sceptical about the attribution of Brahmanic influence on Ayutthaya to Angkor itself.

[49] Loubère 1987: 348; Dhiravat and Smithies 2011: 200.

[50] Kulke 1993: 362-75, for whom the *devarāja* is Śiva himself, who was revered as the tutelary deity. Woodward 2001 takes *devarāja* to be a cult object, probably a sacred fire, but one which clearly identifies the consecration of the king with that of Indra, lord of the gods, and which endows him with *siddhi* or 'magical power.' At any rate, Tambiah's reference (1976: 98-101) to the *devarāja* cult as "a sort of apotheosis of the king during his life", must be discarded. Tambiah also follows George Coedès in seeing Angkor as a microcosm of the universe ruled by the gods. This axis mundi interpretation has been coming under some criticism of late, as in Puett 2002: 32-3, 42. Nevertheless, there are echoes of this principle, in a less absolute sense perhaps, to be found the *Intharaphisek* ceremony, mentioned in the *Palace Law* 72, 126-8 (and Woraporn 2007), which consecrates the king as Indra and has the parade ground turned into a representation of Mount Meru.

[51] This divinised quality lies behind the looser use of the *devarāja* term by Nidhi 2005: 325-6.

[52] Kulke 1993: 374.

[53] *RCA:* 232. Thanks to Chris Baker (personal correspondence) for identifying the "holy grand royal teachers and holy royal teachers" in the passage as "two of the four heads of the Brahman department" and for alerting me to the theme of divine incarnation in the sources used here.

[54] Baker and Pasuk 2017b: 17.

> Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Śiva, those with incomparable power, because they felt compassionate toward mankind, fearing that the world would face total disaster… were intent on combining the bodies of all the eight great gods together with themselves to come and be born in the royal lineage which has great ancestry on both sides, in order to suppress enemies, to turn the world right side up… to help sustain Buddhism.[55]

The king is therefore not just created by these principal gods of the Indic pantheon, but is somehow a manifestation of them all or, at least, a receptacle for their power. This is clearly what the act of consecration, and perhaps subsequent bathing ceremonies in the ritual year, achieved.[56] Narai took his name from Viṣṇu, after relatives had thought they had seen four arms at his birth. A legend sprung up around him, probably within his lifetime, that he had revealed his nature as an avatar of Viṣṇu through using his four arms to escape a palace fire caused by lightning.[57] The Brahmanic eulogy to Narai announced that:

> It is a wonder that the deity supreme above all others who resides above the ocean of pure milk, Four-armed Lord Vishnu, has descended to be born on earth as the King [Narai], who has so much might and glory, more than any king since antiquity.[58]

If this represents a long-term feature of Ayutthaya kingship, some of the traditions that seemed all-hallowed by Narai's time appear to have been the deliberate creations of his immediate predecessor, Prasat Thong (reigned 1629-1656), another usurper moved by a keenly felt legitimacy deficit. His response was to move kingship consistently towards the divinised model, deliberately drawing on the Angkor inheritance to do so. The chronicles tell us that in 1630-1, Prasat Thong sent men to Angkor to bring back plans as the basis for his own architectural projects. The temple of Wat Chai Watthanaram still stands today as testimony to this source of inspiration.[59] Prasat Thong also identified himself with the founder-king of Ayutthaya, Ramathibodhi, perhaps because he saw the innovations of his reign as equally foundational.[60]

---

[55] Baker and Pasuk 2017b: 16. The poem describes the "gods eleven joined with one resolve / to make a holy Lord All-Knowing one", which equates their production of the king with the production of a Buddha.

[56] See also Baker and Pasuk 2016: 70-2, 77 (on the use of the term *thep manut*, 'divine-human'), 115; Nidhi 2005: 22 uses the *Yuan Phai* (Baker and Pasuk 2017b) as evidence for the argument that "offerings to the gods and the king can be considered identical because the king is an avatar (incarnation) of a god."

[57] Compare the *Yodaya Yazawin* (Tun Aung Chain 2005: 49), with Gervaise 1688: 243-4. Also Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 228; and Dhiravat 1984: 267.

[58] Dhiravat 2015: 83. See also Nidhi 2005: 22 on the *Anirut Khamchan*, which begins with a passage about an avatar of 'Phra Narai' (i.e. Viṣṇu) coming to rule Ayutthaya. In the *Long Song Prophecy*, Narai is rather described as a 'refuge' of the gods, which may be a more Buddhist rendering of the idea of the king as a 'manifestation of the eleven dreaded ones' idea. Chris Baker (personal communication) has provided the following translation of the relevant line: "He is the refuge of humans in the world / the refuge of the gods in every astrological house". This is more literal than that in Cushman and Wyatt 2001: 5.

[59] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 145; Fouser 1996: 31, 96-7; and Dhiravat 1984: 17.

[60] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 145; Van Vliet 2005: 243; and Fouser 1996: 97-8.

The result – as in many other examples of divinised kingship worldwide – was a system in which the ruler was subject to elaborate ritualisation and concealment, and an overmastering anxiety about the need to control magical forces that might threaten to puncture his status.[61] It is not often that we can connect ritual innovations so clearly to personal psychology, but in this case it is difficult not to evoke Prasat Thong's acute sense of insecurity and paranoia, which also issued in brutal purges of *khunnang* (court officials).[62] Yet, importantly, Baker has also alluded to a more structural development at work: the progressive removal of the king's presence from the battlefield.[63] The implication is that it was the dissipating opportunity to establish raw charisma in war that fuelled such recourse to its routinised ritual elaboration. Once again, the shift from heroic to cosmic kingship is in evidence.

We are lucky then to be able to witness how such a system was fashioned in the accounts by Dutchmen, such as Van Vliet. At the same time, European reports can be tested against the Thai *Palace Law of Ayutthaya*, compiled in the late 15th century (although also subsequently updated in parts), which indicates that many of the core principles were already evident from an early stage. [64] While the importance of royal distance from normal human interaction is already notable in the *Palace Law,* there is little doubt that Prasat Thong pushed it as far as it could go: the king and queen's appearances to both the people and elite were heavily restricted, and, when they did occur, were heavily stage managed; courtiers were subject to extreme physical abasement in his presence; the palace was walled into an expanded and forbidding edifice, the gates almost always shut; royal titles became extremely complex and formal; the Khmer-based special language of the palace may have been instituted in his reign; close relatives were identified as the most suitable marriage partners; the king's name became forbidden knowledge. [65]

Naturally, Prasat Thong's Brahmans were central to all this and worked to increase his identification with Indra, lord of the gods, in particular.[66] Indeed, this identification was a long-term feature of Ayutthayan kingship and a principal means by which the cosmic divinisation of the king as the origin point of natural order and fertility was effected.[67] In Prasat Thong's case, it was also driven by his increasingly obsessive relationship with astrology, which promised him protection from dark futures. In 1639, the year 1000 of the Chulasakkarat calendar approached, signalling an impending era of calamity (*kali yuga*). (This is intriguingly analogous to astrological-calendrical anxieties in the Safavid and Mughal courts around the end of the Muslim millennium forty years

[61] The need for the supernatural protection of the king is evident in *Palace Law*, 60, 97.

[62] Kemp 1969: 4; Dhiravat 1984: 158; Van der Cruysse 2002: 75: when his beloved daughter died and the cremation fire failed to burn all her remains, he suspected magic and poisoning and had 2,900 persons among the royalty and *khunnang* executed.

[63] Baker 2013: 80-1 contrasts the open, public, informal style of kingship under Naresuan, circa 1595, with its transformation under Eksathotsarot and especially Prasat Thong.

[64] Baker and Pasuk 2016.

[65] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 143-7; Loubère 1987: 345. On royal name taboos elsewhere, see Duindam 2016: 187.

[66] Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 146.

[67] Woraporn 2007, which emphasises, however, the Buddhicization of Indra, who was elevated because he had played a part in helping Buddha to enlightenment.

earlier).[68] Prasat Thong engaged in frenetic merit-accruing activities in the few years leading up to 1639, but ultimately called upon his Brahmans to construct a ritual means of averting this threat and re-establishing the calendar on a new basis. This climaxed with the king mounting a representation of Mount Meru, dressed in white and taking the part of Indra – indeed being consecrated as such – and erasing the old era from a golden tablet.[69] He would be the "renewer of everything" as Van Vliet put it, seeking "to change everything spiritually."[70]

If Van Vliet can be believed, Prasat Thong's preoccupation with the deployment of ritual power and protection led him as far as the profoundly non-Buddhist and unusual practice of human sacrifice. When the gates to the city and palace were rebuilt, he ordered two pregnant women to be placed in the pits of the gateposts, in order to make angry protective spirits.[71] We certainly have good reason to regard Van Vliet's account with suspicion, given that it seems to have played upon nascent tropes of Oriental despotism with political ends in mind. But there was a pre-Buddhist tradition of such practices in the wider region and this claim at least fits with how deeply Prasat Thong had become enmeshed within immanentist religiosity – even to the point of exploring its more transgressive and 'non-euphemised' forms.[72]

Narai then inhabited the system of ritual concealment that Prasat Thong had perfected, as the French reports from the 1680s by the likes of La Loubère and Tachard testify. According to Nicolas Gervaise:

> There has never been any court anywhere in the world more mysterious [*mysterieuse*] than that of the king of Siam. One does not walk, speak, drink, or eat or cook without ceremony …. Everything that is destined for use by His Majesty is considered sacred and is so much venerated that it is removed out of sight of people and even to point at it is forbidden on pain of suffering the mutilation of the offending finger….[he goes on to describe a class of officials who carry things to the palace, but these must in turn hand items to the king's] pages, who must give them to him in a great golden bowl on the end of a long handle, which they have to hold while remaining prostrate on the ground until he has taken it in his hands.[73]

Gervaise then describes the elaborate procedures surrounding the king's mealtimes,

[68] See Moin 2012.

[69] Dhiravat 1984: 198-9; Van Vliet 2005: 20, 56-7; Bhawan 2007: 88-9; and Woraporn 2007: 149-50

[70] Van Vliet 2005: 157.

[71] Van Vliet 2005: 114, 156; Kemp 1969: 44-5; and Bhawan 2007: 3, 87.

[72] 'Non-euphemised' kingship is presented as a potential feature of immanentism in Strathern 2019. Van Vliet's text can be read as an argument for the conquest of Siam as a legitimate and practical aim for the VOC: see Chris Baker's Introduction to Van Vliet 2005: 42, 92-7. To my knowledge, however, no scholar has yet argued that these claims were fiction. For evidence of ritual human sacrifice in 19th century Cambodia, see Chandler 1979 and also Wright 1990. Also, for the possibility of a very similar sacrifice in the founding of Bangkok, see Cook 1989: 220. There is no evidence that his successor, Narai, ever resorted to such measures, apart from a rumour by the Franciscan Missionary, Morelli: Halikowski-Smith 2011: 358.

[73] Gervaise 1688: 299-300.

in which he "eats with his head down and alone."[74] Even his conversation could not be of the mortal variety, for it had to be conducted in a special language known only to the nobles who were close to the king.[75]

However, where the sacralisation of the ruler is achieved through such emphatic forms of ritualisation, this may come at the cost of their freedom of movement as political actors. This is a fundamental reason why many monarchical traditions evolve into 'diarchies' of some description. This may take the form of a king and his vizier, in which the latter increasingly takes on the actual business of governance, as may be seen in various examples from the Muslim world.[76] It may also take the form of two figures firmly conceived of as kings, in which one represents the more cosmic responsibilities of monarchy and the other the heroic realm of warfare. At any rate, the point here is that we surely see an echo of this logic in the division of the palace in Ayutthaya between Front and Rear sections, each with their own sets of officials: the Front dealing with more public and military matters, the Rear with more domestic ones.[77] In a sense, the king's palace was identified with his body: the same phrase in Thai, *ruean luang*, was used for both.[78] Such was the king protected from all normal forms of sensory apprehension. Once again, it should be emphasised that appropriate parallels for this may be found far outside Southeast Asia. [79]

Queens, meanwhile, were hidden from the sight of all but palace women and eunuchs.[80] Royal marriages took on an incestuous quality: Narai, for example, married his paternal half-sister and, when she died in 1685, he seems to have raised his daughter, Kromluang Yothathep, to the status of a queen.[81] The European sources, fascinated by this concealed and powerful young woman and puzzling at her status, referred to her as the 'Princess Queen.'[82] Such practices were certainly transgressive by normal standards, and no doubt underscored that kings lived by quite different rules to their subjects, although transgression per se does not seem to have been the objective. Although the tendency of successors and usurpers to marry the wives and relatives of their predecessors indicates some sort of status for royal blood, nor does the practice seem designed to produce exceptionally pure-blooded heirs (as in the case of Hawaii).[83] It may be then that the concealment of the queen – and to some extent all palace women – was a result

[74] Gervaise 1688: 301-2. *RCA:* 301 records that a royal page, Phra Pi, was allowed to break some of these food taboos.

[75] Tachard 1686: 214.

[76] See Van Leeuwen 2017.

[77] This conforms to a ubiquitous distinction between the inner and outer section of royal palaces; see Duindam 2016: 168-88.

[78] Baker and Pasuk 2016: 51.

[79] This is to disagree somewhat with Forest 1998, I: 152-3, who develops a thesis about Indo-Buddhist kingship as based on a principle of stillness, an immobile centre, somewhat reminiscent of Geertz's famous work (1980) on Bali.

[80] Loubère 1987: 345-7; Kemp 1969: 28.

[81] Gervaise 1688: 249-51; See Dhiravat 1984: 48 on Kromluang Yothathep; and Bhawan 2016.

[82] Kemp 1969: 24.

[83] See Kemp 1969: 25.

of her physical intimacy with the king's body.[84] Any relationship that touched on the stubbornly corporeal basis for his being had to be shrouded in taboo. Furthermore, the queen was, in any case, a sovereign of a kind in her own right, with her own version of a court (a *krom*) among the female courtiers and eunuchs, situated in extensive closed-off quarters, which operated according to similar rules of etiquette, and with her own spheres of patronage, revenues, magazine, ships, and trading ventures.[85] In this respect the queens of Ayutthaya do bear comparison with the female chiefs of Hawaii.

The king on display

Once again, Gervaise is difficult to resist:

> The kings who have ruled it up to the present are accorded honours that would seem to be due only to God… if they are given to appear rarely in public, this is perhaps because they are apprehensive of their Peoples coming to realize that the majority of kings are made, often enough, like other men and have imperfections and weaknesses as they do. Their policy is no less secret than their lives: it is a mystery that is only revealed to those whom they charge to look after public affairs. The freedom which everyone in Europe has to discuss the Prince and his conduct is viewed in Siam as a crime against the State. For this reason the king's name is never revealed to the People during his lifetime.'[86]

As crude as it may seem, Gervaise surely touches upon the ultimate function of the extraordinary etiquette that governed the king's appearances at court: to destroy the idea that he was, after all, just a man. A strict form of prostration was insisted upon, in which one inched forward painfully on all fours, head down, hands joined at the forehead, in total silence.[87] Even in councils four hours long, the ministers lay prostrate and reverent throughout.[88] At all times, the king had to be placed physically higher than anyone else.[89] On occasions such as the receptions of ambassadors, the king appeared at a high window, looking out onto his audience below. But the window was curtained, and it was only after a loud blast on the trumpets warned the court to lower their heads that the curtains were whisked open.[90] Highly formal and scripted dialogue inevitably followed.

So consistent are European writers, both Dutch and French, in pronouncing that all this was equivalent to revering the king as deity that one may suspect the influence

[84] The untouchability of the primary queen and the exclusive control over all women of the palace as a 'symbolic dramatization of power' is already evident in the Baker and Pasuk 2016: 74.

[85] Evidence from Choisy 1995 [1687]: 225 that she had her own provinces too, (and see 239, 273) although contradicted by Loubère 1987: 346, and see Tachard 1686: 377; Céberet 1992: 106-7; and Kemp 1969: 27.

[86] Gervaise 1688: 77-8.

[87] On silence, see Baker and Pasuk 2016: 61, 94-5.

[88] Tachard 375: "the respect they have for the King goes as far as adoration."

[89] Forbin 1991: 33.

[90] Gervaise 1688: 303; Loubère 1987: 1987: 340-2; Kemp 1969: 10-11; and Céberet 1992: 108. Dhiravat 1984: 23 refers to Dutch evidence.

of an Orientalist formula in which the king is always made to sit "like an idol on his throne."[91] But they were surely correct to connect the elaborate stage management of the king's appearance with his sacralisation. Listening to the king's titles would only have confirmed the impression. Van Vliet reproduced a letter from the King of Pegu to the King of Siam that referred to their common status "worshipped like the sun at its height of the heaven with joy and pleasure as immortal gods".[92] The more perceptive observers also noticed that the modes of polite behaviour of the Siamese around the king were, in one sense, an extension of a more general culture of bodily expressing respect for social superiors – just as the special language of the palace reflected a more general linguistic tendency to express many fine gradations of hierarchy.[93]

It is worth reflecting on the fact that the French arrived as emissaries from the European court culture most associated with absolutism, the flamboyant glamorisation of its 'Sun-king', and the claim of rule by divine right.[94] Yet, evidently the drama of divinisation surrounding Narai was perceived to be on an utterly different level. French bishops and ambassadors were not only expressing European amour propre when they were reluctant to kowtow in Siam; there was a deeper disjuncture of court culture at play. It helps here to note how correspondingly perplexed the Siamese ambassadors were at Versailles in November 1684 to see people jostling around the person of Louis XIV as they were led towards him.[95] The missionary, Bénigne Vachet, who accompanied them from Siam, alleviated their discomfiture by asking them to prostrate themselves – whereupon the French king told them to stand.

However, it is the account of the Persian embassy of 1686 by Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi that is most valuable in allowing us to break out of the prism of our European sources – which, after a while, we may suspect of continuously reflecting beams of light issuing from earlier European representations.[96] This report is particularly intriguing given that the Safavids were widely known for the extent to which they inspired reverence, drawing on their Sufi origins and Iranian traditions to establish unusually emphatic elements of divinisation for a monotheistic context: the ambassadors referred to their own king as "the very *qibla* [direction of prayer] of the world, the *ka'ba* of mankind."[97] A French missionary to Persia a few years later remarked that they considered their king "the most

[91] Joost Schouten 'A Description of the Government… 1636' in Smithies 1995: 19; and see Bhawan 2007: 60, 65, 91-2. Van Vliet 2005: 112: the king "is worshipped and honoured by his subjects more than a god." Compare Bourges 1668: 159, and Gervaise 1688: 289: to kings "the people give almost the same honour on earth as they give to the gods who have already entered nirvana." Forest 1998 I: 151 raises the issue of Western perception.

[92] Bhawan 2007: 73.

[93] Gervaise 1688: 63-4, 98-102; Van Vliet 2005: 145, 148; and Loubère 1987: 242-3.

[94] Love 1999: 12; Asch 2014: 112-3; and Van der Cruysse 2002: 260. One would expect the Dutch to indicate less taste for such overweening monarchicalism

[95] *Mémoires de Bénigne Vachet* in Launay 1920, I: 142-3.

[96] The European texts indicate some awareness of earlier and other accounts – they were therefore informed by textual learning as well as observation.

[97] Muhammad Rabi 1972: 53. The doxology with which the text begins conveys the notion that "The sultan is the shadow of the Lord", and that God "invests the kings with their kingship." See Matthee 2012: 14-16 on Safavid sacred kingship.

magnificent, the most powerful and the most absolute ruler of all Asia.'"[98] Moreover, most intriguingly, in the 1680s the Safavid monarch was more remote than he had ever been, as Shah Suleiman diminished all forms of accessibility, either in court or in public outings (which were normally *quruqchi*s, occasions from which all males over six years of age were banned). The Safavid shahs were undergoing their own evolution, in other words, from charismatic warrior kings to creatures of the palace, and indeed, the governance of the realm was suffering as a result.[99] Yet, the reactions of the Persians to Siamese court ceremony are in some ways rather similar to those of the French:

> The Siamese consider the king's throne room the most sacred edifice there is … when we arrived the Siamese officials and translators who were accompanying us all prostrated themselves, as if they were worshipping God, the one true King. We were still a good distance from the door but they had already caught a glimpse of the throne so they fell to the ground. The authorities were considerate enough to excuse us from this form of homage and we paid our respects in the normal manner. … This huge mass of people, face down on the mats and rugs, looked like a large congregation of Muslims saying their prayers. They were arranged row after row like a collection of dead bodies and not a single person moved or showed the least sign of life.[100]

After describing the reception of the letter from the Safavid king, Ibrahim remarks on the salutation prefacing each address of the king, a prayer that was "the very essence of religious error. 'Divine Protector of Heaven and earth, your command hangs over my head. Be merciful to me.'" He contrasts this with the more modest Persian formulation – appropriate to addressing a king rather than a divinity.[101] Elsewhere Ibrahim remarks: "Considering himself an upstanding idolater and a god in his own right, the king lives a life of the strictest devotion."[102] Once again, then, our monotheistic observer picks up an altogether distinct form of sacralisation.

Palace meetings with courtiers, officials and ambassadors could not be avoided; but the common man? He was denied all vison of his sovereign except in a radically reduced number of occasions. These became moments of highly orchestrated drama, in which the people en masse were themselves part of the theatre they witnessed: in a system that depended on manpower above all, the extent of royal power was indicated by the sheer numbers who could be summoned by its presence.[103]

By the 1680s, there were only one or two standard occasions in the year for the

[98] Sanson 1695.

[99] Matthee 2012: 57-9 and 197-9.

[100] Muhammad Rabi 1972: 62. Marcinkowski 2005: 36 notes that a similar form of proskynesis was used in the Safavid court.

[101] Muhammad Rabi 1972: 64. See also the discussion in Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007: 166-7.

[102] Muhammad Rabi 1972: 139 and in describing Narai's accession (96): "It is the belief of the Siamese that their princes and kings are divine and no native would ever think of fighting with them or killing one of them."

[103] The people therefore became part of the spectacle they marvelled at, and by which foreign spectators were overawed. See Baker 2013: 102 on the epic poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.

public unveiling of the king.[104] There had previously been others, as La Loubère notes, including a ploughing ceremony to mark the start of the rice growing season. This rite invoked an ubiquitous conception of the cosmic king as a guarantor of fertility, but already in the *Palace Law* it was left to a king-for-the-day to perform.[105] Given that this position of substitute king was an inauspicious one, it is reminiscent of the logic of the scapegoat king as explored in an African context by René Girard and others.[106] There is an intriguing parallel in what happened to a second ceremony of environmental magic, the 'speeding of the outflow' at the end of the monsoon period, which was also abandoned by Narai in 1676 (see below). In this ceremony the king rode out to a barge and struck the floodwaters with a long-handled fan in order to effect their withdrawal. The flood was the very essence of natural power: necessary for the fertilisation of the soil, but disastrous if uncontained and uncontrolled. One of the earliest descriptions of this rite is contained in the Portuguese imperial chronicle by Diogo do Couto, who reports: "they say the king has driven the waters away because all the attributes that are due to God these Pagans give to their kings and believe that all the good things (*bens*) come from them."[107] At one time, the king's role as a pivotal interlocutor with the divine forces that governed the operation of water had also been evident in another ceremony, the intricate *Bophok* rite described in the *Palace Law*, which climaxed with the king's intercourse with one female spirit and the propitiation of another, a fierce spirit of the waters.[108] All such associations with the watery forces of fertility may also have referenced associations between the king and Indra.[109]

That left the *kathin* ceremony in late October or early November as the one occasion for the people of Ayutthaya to be let into the theatre state.[110] The *kathin* was an occasion

[104] Loubère 1987. 221-2 has five or six originally, subsequently reduced to two, at the start of the sixth and twelfth months of the year. But Kemp 1969: 20 notes that there is no evidence of the first of these being observed, and Gervaise 1688: 293 refers to only one public outing in the year, the day of the boat races (see below). Indeed, La Loubère is vague as to when rites were dispensed with, and it is noteworthy that Fernão Mendes Pinto (1989: 429), apparently writing during the 1540-50s, has it that the king only appeared in public twice a year. The extent of innovation in state ceremony, in general, may be revealed by contrasting with the rites laid out in Baker and Pasuk 2016: 69.

[105] This is described in the *Palace Law* (Baker and Pasuk 2016: 118), as taking place in the sixth month of the calendar, in which the king "graciously reduces his royal authority" to allow Phonlathep, or a Minister for Lands, to be king for a day. See also Van Vliet 48-9 on the 'Paddy-King' and Loubère 1987: 166-7.

[106] See the discussion in Scubla 2005. La Loubère attributes this shift to a substitute to a bad omen, perhaps astrologically conceived. The account of a scapegoat king for the day, in *The Ship of Sulaiman* (Muhammad Rabi 1972: 132), may well derive from a report about the paddy king, but may also reflect a Safavid history of ritual scapegoatism as a response to astrological prediction (on which, see Melvin-Koushki 2018: 366).

[107] Couto 1778: 126-7 (Livro VII, Capitulo IX).

[108] Baker and Pasuk 2016: 72, 124-5. Baker and Pasuk suggest that it may be linked to the Khmer ritual of sleeping with a naga princess as a spirit of the earth. Both carry echoes of the stranger-king logic described by Marshall Sahlins (eg Sahlins and Graeber 2017), and may reflect the idea that the king must unite with and overmaster autochthonous spirits in order to release powers of fertility and abundance. Baker and Pasuk suggest it had a purificatory function.

[109] Woraporn 2007.

[110] It is possible that the speeding of the outflow was at one point combined with the *kathin* ceremony, as Kaempfer 1998 [1690]: 72 and Tachard 1686: 260 (see also Kemp 1969: 20) assume. They certainly occurred at the same time of year around the end of the rainy season, and both were associated with a great public barge

for the laity to donate new robes to the sangha, marking the end of the rainy season retreat of the monks when they retired for serious meditation for three months. It was used by the kings as a great procession of state to visit the chief monk (*sangkharat*) and the principal temples, including Wat Pa Kaeo, in which the king could act as the alms-giver par excellence.[111] The principal journey was the *kathin nam*, in which beautiful gilded barges—Tachard counted 159—processed along the river.[112] It ended with a barge race back to the palace. No-one failed to be impressed by the spectacle. "No words sufficiently magnificent to express what I have just seen," remarked the Abbé de Choisy in his journal of 4 November 1685.[113] 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.[114]

Prasat Thong had added another *kathin* trip by land to the Mahatat, but this was not permitted to be watched.[115] Indeed, all journeys that the king needed to take by land were subject to strict obstructions of the direct gaze.[116] Still, the cortège was elaborate on such occasions, the king followed by parasols, "symbols of royal divinity".[117] Other journeys by water necessitated the erection of reed fences on the riverbanks, orders to shut all windows and doors, and the observance of pure silence.[118]

Such were the means by which a habitus of reverence was lodged deep into the instincts of the Siamese.

---

race attended by the king. The speeding of the outflow appears in the *Palace Law*, 121, as the royal ceremony of boat-chasing, and Do Couto's account in the 1590s (1778: 126-7) confirms the element of the boat race too. António Francisco Cardim's account, in *Relation de la Province de la Iapon* (1646) (in Breazeale and Smithies 2011: 186), presents the barge race as following the speeding of the outflow and, in turn, followed by the *khhunnang* going to the 'pagodes' to give alms to the monks, which possibly refers to the *kathin*. However, Gervaise 1688: 293, and Loubère 1987: 221-2, assume the two rites were distinct, and indeed they had quite different purposes. Moreover, the accounts of the abolition of the custom (as in Abbé de Choisy 1995: 202) suggest that the date for this ceremony was moveable and dependent on astrological predictions. See also Vollant des Verquains 1691: 99-100.

[111] See notes to Van Vliet 2005: 119-20 for attempts to locate the temples visited.

[112] Joost Schouten in Smithies 1995: 15; Bhawan 2007: 84-5; Dhiravat 1984: 23-4; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 142; and Forest 1998, I: 270.

[113] Choisy 1687: 243; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 52-3.

[114] Choisy 1687: 244.

[115] Kemp 1969: 22-3.

[116] Loubère 1987: 222; Van Vliet 2005: 116; Merolli, in Halikowski-Smith 2011: 370-1; and Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 143.

[117] Gervaise 1688: 289.

[118] Gervaise 1688: 292-3.

The king as magician

One last and simple way to assess the nature of the king's sacralisation is to consider how concretely actual supernatural powers were attributed to him. This possibility is already implicit in the claims of rulers to unparalleled reserves of merit, for merit was something that could be made immanent in the world as well as used to transcend it. But rulers were also credited with special expertise in magical lore.[119]

We might expect the palace chronicles written long after the events to be full of stories about the magic of kings, as the mythical mind and the eulogistic one worked in harmony – although even these may reflect popular suspicions of what kings might be able to do.[120] The chronicle accounts of the voyage of the Siamese ambassadors to France in 1686 are certainly full of magical events, testifying to the powers of the Siamese king and his men, such as their ability to make themselves entirely invincible to French gunfire.[121] One of these events again turns on the ability of the king to control the movements of the elements. It describes how the ship, as it neared France, was beset by an awful whirlpool, and was only saved by the ritual services provided by an adept they had taken on board. When the French king asked the Siamese party how they had managed such a miraculous escape, the ambassador says that they had "made a prayer of sincerity calling upon the holy constantly powerful condition of the supreme accumulation of merit belonging to the Supreme Holy Buddha Lords omnipotent [i.e. the Siamese and French kings] on both sides, who for the first time would form a holy royal relationship…", and which created a divine wind that brought the ship to safety.[122]

At this point, we can turn to a rare and precious thing: a fragment of the journal kept by the actual ambassador to France, Kosa Pan, during his voyage of 1686. All we have is a small portion of what must have been a vast document; it covers 20 June to 4 July, during which time Kosa Pan was staying in Brest.[123] At one point, Kosa Pan notes his response to a well-wisher: "The journey we made was a long one, but we met with no danger, thanks to the power of the king, my lord."[124] This may have been no more than a conventional phrase, but if so, it encodes a normative sense that the king's powers of protection were truly godlike, and could cross half the world to provide succour to

[119] See the discussion in Baker and Pasuk: 2017a: 227-9: "In Siam this tradition went under many names including *wicha* (Pali: *vijja*), meaning learning or knowledge, similar to the past meaning of the old English word 'lore'."

[120] Sorasak, for example, is described as mounting and taming a ferocious bull elephant and "due to his merit in miraculous form and due to the power of the Vedic mantras and the spells of white magic which he had skilfully created through meditation, he failed to be endangered in any way" (RCA 302). Much of the material in the section of the chronicles about the post-1662/3 period was written long afterwards. See Nidhi 2005: 291-5, 303-4 on the dating of composition of various versions of the chronicles.

[121] *RCA:* 271-7. Coedès 1921: 12 sees the account of the embassy as an echo of Siamese gossip, noting that chronicle redactions do not predate the 19th century.
RCA:, 271-7.

[122] *RCA:* 172. This Buddhicises the French king in an intriguing manner – for he too must have accrued merit in order to have been reborn as a king.

[123] Van der Cruysse's introduction to Kosa Pan's Diary (Visudh 2002) suggests it would have run to over 1,000 pages.

[124] Visudh 2002 : 38, also 40.

his subjects. If such was his reach, then it is no wonder that Van Vliet reports of Prasat Thong that here "one hardly dares to have a wicked intention in his mind as they have the idea (though this is absurd) that there is living a Divine Majesty in the king…"[125]

The king and the Sangha

The monks are "the arbiters of the fate of kings."[126]

Yet, such a being, about as exalted as mortal wit could devise, still had to bow to the monks rather than vice versa…. What was the nature of the relationship then between the monarchy and the sangha?[127] It is clear that, in many respects, Ayutthayan kingship conforms to a general 'Theravadin' vision of a relatively unified sangha under the protection and scrutiny of the king – as distinct from East Asian models, for example. The sangha was subject to a degree of hierarchical organisation, although our sources disagree as to how much control the monastic heads (*sangkharat*) really had, and how much these, in turn, were subject to a pre-eminent hierarch in Ayutthaya.[128] However, the sangha never attained the organisational autonomy and integration equivalent to that of the Catholic Church, for example.[129] It depended rather on the agency of the king, who appointed the *sangkharat*, and devolved routine supervision and judicial authority over the monks to one of his ministers, the *Okya phrasedet*.[130] The most resonant exercise of the king's jurisdiction, as guardian of the sangha, was his capacity to reform the monkhood through conducting rigorous examinations and purges.

Given how much the ideology of sovereignty was conveyed and effected through physical comportment, it is of the utmost significance that monks were exempt from the normal form of prostration before the king – and that Narai was forced to avoid encountering them rather than have to salute them like any other layman.[131] This is a graphic image through which to grasp the paradox set up by an elaboration of divinised kingship circumscribed by transcendentalism. In his description of this king-sangha relationship in Sri Lanka, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana used the phrase 'antagonistic symbiosis.'[132] The monk only yielded governmental regulation to the king in order to retain moral authority; and scholarship has been ready to acknowledge that this authority could at certain moments be translated into political clout: the sangha "was perfectly capable of challenging the state when it seemed significantly out of line with Theravada

[125] "His Majesty is worshipped and honoured by his subjects more than a god": Van Vliet 2005: 113.

[126] M. Tessier, 7 March 1734, cited in Forest 1998, III: 362.

[127] See discussion in Forest 1998, III: 419-23.

[128] Loubère 1987: 371 emphasises a lack of integrated hierarchy, while Gervaise 1688: 184-6 points to one. There was no doubt a distinction between de facto status and de jure administrative power, which in turn was temporally variable. See also Dhiravat 1984: 92-3; Tambiah 1976: 160, 180-9; Forest 1998, I: 140; and Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 202.

[129] See also Silber 1995 on Sri Lanka.

[130] Gervaise 1688: 82; Tachard 1686: 223-4.

[131] Gervaise 1688: 190, 298, confirmed by Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 91. Also Choisy 1995: 197: "monks are honoured like the king." Note, in the mid-18th century, the encounter between the Lankan embassy and an almost royally-hidden *sangkharat*, in Pieris 1908: 21.

[132] Gunawardana 1979: 344, Collins 1998: 14.

virtues."[133] Forest goes as far as describing the mass of monks as "an unavoidable political 'party' constituting a formidable vector for the propagation and formation of public opinion."[134] La Loubère provides two perceptive comments pertinent to this theme. After discussing the king's council, he says:

> However, sometimes, but very rarely, and in affairs of a certain nature, he will consult the principal sancrats, who are the superiors of the *talapoins* [monks], whose credit he otherwise diminishes as much as he can, though in appearance he honours them very much.[135]

And later that:

> A Talapoin sins if he interferes with affairs of state…..moreover I believe that a wise policy has done much to prohibit affairs of the State to these people who have so much power over the mind of the people.[136]

What these comments reveal is the attempt to preserve the breach between what would, in a Christian context, be termed 'church' and 'state', and the careful balancing act this involves. The first comment alludes to the way that the king must defer to the monks while continuously stalling their ability to affect the political arena. The second comment—which would shortly appear highly ironic given the events of 1688—indicates that such interdictions were necessary because the ideological sway of the monks over the people was so evident.

Siamese 'absolutism'

The elaboration of the monarchy has thus far been interpreted in terms of the particular mixture of cultural traditions on which Ayutthaya drew, the proclivities and projects of individual rulers, and of certain rather general dynamics inherent in divinisation and righteousness. But it is worth also briefly considering how much it may be related to more purely political and administrative structures. Was the sacralisation of Ayutthaya kingship so awesomely elaborated because the exactions on the *phrai* and the *khunnang* were so great that the question of legitimation was rendered exceptionally acute?

The question is prompted by contemporary and scholarly references to Ayutthaya

[133] Harris 2007b: 3. Reid 1993: 263 puts it that "the sangha could play a political role, as in the overthrow of Narai in 1688, but in no sense did it share in secular power", and see 197, 282, for comparators. Also note Guedes 1994: 21 on the role of the Mon Sangha in overthrowing the Toungoo dynasty in the 1590s, and Grabowsky 2007: 134-5 for a revealing relationship between a charismatic monk and a young king in Laos in the 1690s.

[134] Forest 1998, III: 413. Although the sangha controls the king as much as the king controls the sangha, Forest notes (423-4) that it is not capable of wielding power; its disapproval will instead leave a field of rumour and prediction that a secular leader will have to take advantage of.

[135] Loubère 1987: 350.

[136] Loubère 1987: 397-8.

as an 'absolutist' state – thereby echoing long-standing interpretations of the movements towards political centralisation and royal prerogative under Narai's evangeliser, Louis XIV.[137] The danger here, of course, is taking European representations at face value, given the development over the 17th century of a discourse of 'Oriental despotism', a line of thought about Asian political power going back at least to Aristotle, which depicted it as a tyrannical exercise that reduced subjects to slavishness.[138] This is most explicit in the most theoretical of our sources, Simon de La Loubère, who clearly has one eye on establishing appropriate monarchical norms back home.[139] Clearly, then, one must treat European analyses of how Ayutthaya was governed with a degree of caution. There were certainly elements of the system that the stereotype of absolutism helped to obscure, such as the role of law and precedent in governance and Buddhist discourses of ethical accountability and responsibility.[140] Most significantly, it may fail to capture how much power was 'negotiated and contested' in reality.[141] In fact, however, such stereotypes did, in a manner of speaking, concede that point insofar as they functioned as an attempt to explain how such de jure pretensions ultimately hindered effective and stable rule.[142]

To some extent, Europeans may have been bewitched by the awesome symbolic elevation of the king.[143] But they were also reflecting real political developments over the 17th century, as Ayutthaya waxed into the 'strong form' of the galactic polity, to use Stanley Tambiah's language, or moved from Pattern B decentralised Indic administration into Pattern C centralised, to use Victor Lieberman's.[144] The crucial marker of this shift was that outlying centres were no longer held by hereditary princes, but were subject to firm central control through the appointment of temporary governors.[145] This was a relatively natural process to European eyes. What they found more remarkable was that the Thai kings seemed to have prevented the development of any independent and

[137] Reid 1993: 202-66; Dhiravat 1984: 1990, 130. Note already in 1601, Marcela de Ribadineira (1970: 163-4) refers to the king of Ayutthaya as an 'absolute lord.'

[138] Rubiés 2005. However, one strain of European thinking naturally admired the monarchical centralisation they perceived, e.g., Bourges 1666: 157. In the harangue that the Abbé de Choisy (*Mémoire pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV*, in 1995: 412) prepared for Narai on his voyage to Siam, he referred to Louis XIV's decision to govern his kingdom alone, without a chief minister.

[139] Especially in Loubère 1987 (e.g., 320-5, which also indicates he has read Bernier, 349-57); Forest 1998, I: 149-150. On Bernier, see Rubiés 2005.

[140] On the importance of law in Ayutthaya, see Baker and Pasuk 2016.

[141] Bhawan 2007: 5, in turn invoking David Wyatt; Reid 1993: 252 on "a tension between the sublime rhetoric of absolutism and the reality of autonomy, diversity and contractualism." However, Reynolds' (2006: 34) criticism of the deployment of 'absolutism' in Southeast Asia somewhat evades the issue of de jure rather than de facto authority, i.e. what the *normative* limits to the king's power were and the institutional form they took (the latter, for example, acting as equivalents to the estates, assemblies, law courts and churches of Europe).

[142] Van Vliet 2005: 116; Abbé de Choisy 1995: 304-5.

[143] The *Ship of Suleiman* (Muhammed Rabi 1972: 100) parts ways with the European interpretations here – "the kings of Siam are devoid of power in the absolute sense" – perhaps because the behaviour around the sacralised king would have been less surprising to the Safavid court, and perhaps because of the particularly effective forms of centralisation achieved by the Islamic empires of this period. They were struck, for example, by the lack of a standing army.

[144] Tambiah 1976; Lieberman 2003: 277-82; and Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 152-3.

[145] Gervaise 1688: 84; Chaumont 1733 [1686]: 104.

hereditary aristocracy, one that might command its own sources of wealth, boast of its own prestigious bloodlines, and impress its interests onto the functioning of the state. Instead the elite, or the *khunnang,* were a form of service nobility, whose position was entirely derived from their office – hence their designation by the French as 'mandarins.' The control over the labour of freemen (*phrai*) in the kingdom has been well described elsewhere, as has the growing control over the land, offices and trading opportunities of the *khunnang* under Narai in particular.[146]

For all that, European accounts probably underplay the power that noble families continued to wield. Without some sense of the threat that they represented, it is difficult to understand why, for example, the system should also have depended on brutal punishments and purges. Bodily pain was a ubiquitous judicial penalty in the premodern world, but the punishments advocated by the *Palace Law of Ayutthaya* (compiled in the late 15th century), and subsequently described by Persian no less than the European sources, are certainly arresting.[147] More to the point are the mass executions of *khunnang* that accompanied court purges.[148] These purges were a response to the constant intrigue in the court and the threat of coup.[149] This was, in turn, a measure of how successfully the kings of Ayutthaya had succeeded in subduing the threat of rebellion from rival princely centres and provinces: now the contestation for power was concentrated at the centre. Undoubtedly, the lack of any established principle of succession, and the relative weakness of royal blood did much to fuel the intrigue.[150] The persisting vulnerability of the king was also a reflection of the one great limitation on his assertion of power: while the *khunnang* class could be squeezed out of access to trade, land, and moveable wealth in various ways, the king still depended on them for the operation of the corvée system, and his high officials were also little centres of manpower and patronage themselves.[151] Indeed, the ties of patronage remained the most compelling forms of loyalty in this setting. As David Wyatt puts it: "Ayutthaya had not yet managed to secure the formation of overarching loyalties to the monarch and state that could transcend the personal ties around which cliques and factions formed."[152] In European states, those 'overarching loyalties' could be found in the developing patriotisms that La Loubère finds notable by their absence in Ayutthaya.[153] Now, it may be possible to qualify this point by reference to the events of 1688 itself – which displays signs of the nascent agency of popular

[146] Dhiravat 1984: 14, 63-71, 130; Dhiravat 1990: 130; Baker and Pasuk 2017a: 154-7, 190-3; Reid 1993: 254-59; Van der Cruysse 2002: 85-6.

[147] Loubère 1987: 351-2; Muhammed Rabi 1972: 145; Baker and Pasuk 2016: 61. Baker and Pasuk note that the punishments listed here are not dissimilar to Europe, but also note the use of summary execution for even minor infractions.

[148] Forbin 1991: 43; Bhawan 2007: 11.

[149] A great sense of the physical insecurity of the king is already apparent in the *Palace law* (Baker and Pasuk 2016: 60, 96). See Dhiravat 1984 passim; and Bhawan 2007: 10.

[150] Loubère 1987: 347-8; see the discussion in Dhiravat 1984: 105-7, 132.

[151] Lieberman 2003: 282. An edict in the *Palace Law* (Baker and Pasuk 2016: 101) on the dangers of lesser lords coming to the capital and wooing *phrai* away is eloquent on the imperatives behind the functioning of the galactic polity in manpower-deprived regions.

[152] Wyatt 2001b: 84-5.

[153] Loubère 1987: 356.

feelings with regard to the proper nature of state.[154] From another angle, however, 1688 indicates the perennial priority of factionalism.

It is ultimately difficult to avoid the logic presented in some European accounts: that, in effect, the solutions designed to protect the king from his nobles also exacerbated his insecurity in the long term; that they risked diminishing the capacity for the wider elite to feel that they had a stake in the enterprise of the state.[155] In our own time, we would recognise some of these 'solutions' as those of a paranoid dictator: the attempt to stop conversations between *khunnang* at court, the recourse to sudden and graphic punishment; the use of spies and informants, the divide and rule of factions …[156] If these are the problems of all monarchies, they were notably acute in this most 'monarchical' of societies.[157] The more that the *khunnang* depended on the king's favour for their wealth and status and even their security, the more they might risk all to ensure that it turned their way. At times, it seems as if the Ayutthaya kings were in a state of war with their own officials, and there is no more vivid symbol of that than the extraordinary degree to which they explicitly favoured foreigners – especially in areas that touched most intimately on the king's security and advantage, the conduct of trade and the protection of his person.

Conclusion

This essentially 'extraverted' quality to the Ayutthaya state is in itself, of course, a major reason why Narai found himself in the 1680s so tangled up in Persian and, particularly, French designs on his soul. However, the more important point for the theme of this article is to note that the 'absolutism' of the Ayutthaya kings was not a matter of sublime control, but rather the occupation of a precarious position at the apex of a somewhat unstable pyramid. The process of divinisation through isolation and de-humanisation, most notably pursued by Prasat Thong and maintained by Narai, might plausibly be interpreted as driven by the need to distance the king from the officers beneath him – for bodily protection, indeed, but also as a means of symbolically elevating him above them, turning him into an entirely different being. Thus, the runaway dynamic of status enhancement is, as in so many other cases, an expression of the dynamics between the king and the wider elite on whom he must both depend and overmaster.[158]

However, that is no more than one possible reason why sacred kingship was so profoundly elaborated in Ayutthaya. There is a sense in which the monarchy was also locked into status rivalry with Buddhism, given how foundational the latter was to Ayutthaya in both ideological and social terms. Kings naturally drew upon Buddhist images of both righteousness and divinisation, and yet also worked to supplement

[154] As I argue in *Converting Kings* (Strathern, forthcoming), drawing on Baker and Pasuk 2017a.

[155] Loubère 1987: 356; compare the analysis in Reid 1993: 262.

[156] Loubère 1987: 350-1; Gervaise 1688: 77-8.

[157] Gervaise 1688: 77: "There is no State in the Indies more monarchical than that of Siam."

[158] Ironically, this behavioural-symbolic distancing from his officials also risked increasing his administrative dependence on them.

this with Brahmanic forms. (In some ways these worked together, of course, to form a general grammar of exaltation; distinguishing them is, therefore, a highly etic, and in that sense, artificial exercise.) These projects of status enhancement and legitimacy-capture in Ayutthaya brought with them, however, certain distinct tensions. The evolution of kingship into a more isolated and ceremonialised office opened up a certain vulnerability to the ritualisation trap. A mildly diarchic arrangement of rulers occupying the Front and Rear palaces did not provide any stable solution. Narai himself provided a means of surmounting some of the obstacles to conducting diplomacy, in particular by repairing ever more frequently to Lobpuri where more informal encounters could take place.[159] Indeed, rulers only fall into the ritualisation trap when they are pushed by an increasingly powerful sub-royal elite class, which Prasat Thong and Narai managed to avoid by forestalling the power of the *khunnang* in various ways. The kings still retained certain forms of authority that dazzled European eyes. But by the end of Narai's reign, it was clear that this came at the price of a heavy dependence on foreign elites, who might themselves become an overmighty centre of patronage and power. At the same time, the *public* rites that spoke clearly of the cosmic intercessory function of the ritualised king were in abeyance. Heroic charisma was still, of course, available and given Buddhist ratification through the principle of merit – but it was perhaps more readily grasped by insurgents, particularly so during the succession crises, which it both drove and reflected.

In other parts of the world, such emphatic projects of ruler divinisation often entailed the assertion of dominance over the religious sphere more generally: kings sought to assert their ritual centrality as pre-eminent intercessors with the divine as a concomitant of their institutional centrality as heads of the priesthood.[160] In this case, however, although the monarchy did indeed wield a rather strong supervision of the sangha in institutional terms, the latter retained a strikingly high status and moral authority nonetheless. This extraordinary project of divinisation was thus contained within a still higher discourse, and the ruler placed within a classically transcendentalist predicament of perpetual negotiation of status with the clerisy. It should be recalled that this took the rather concrete form of assassination attempts. It will be argued elsewhere that it also took expression in the events of 1688.

Bibliography

Alam, Muzaffar and Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. 2007. *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800*, Cambridge.

Asch, Ronald G. 2014. *Sacral Kingship between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment: The French and English Monarchies, 1587–1688*. New York and Oxford.

Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongpaichit. 2016. *The Palace Law of Ayutthaya and the Thammasat:*

[159] See Strathern forthcoming b.

[160] Although note that in *Unearthly Powers* I suggest that this tended to happen when rulers were charged with the mana of unusually existential forms of military victory – which applies to Taksin but surely less so to Prasat Thong and Narai.

Law and Kingship in Siam. Ithaca.

Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongpaichit. 2017a. *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam in the Early Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press..

Baker, Chris and Pasuk Phongpaichit. 2017b. *Yuan Phai, the Defeat of Lanna: A Fifteenth Century Thai Epic Poem.* Chiang Mai.

Baker, Chris. 2013. 'The Grand Palace in the *Description of Ayutthaya*: Translation and Commentary', *JSS* 101: 69-112.

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

Bhawan Ruangsilp. 2016. 'Kromluang Yothathep: King Narai's Daughter and Ayutthaya Court Intrigue'. *JSS* 104, 95-110.

Bourges*,* Jacques de. 1666. *Relation du voyage de Monseigneur l'Evêque de Béryte, vicaire apostolique du royaume de la Cochinchine, par la Turquie, la Perse, les Indes, &c. jusqu'au royaume de Siam & autres lieux.* Paris.

Bowring, John. 1857. *The Kingdom and People of Siam.* 2 vols. London.

Breazeale, Kennon and Michael Smithies ed., trans. 2011. 'About the mission in the Kingdom of Siam' in Smithies, ed., *500 Years of Thai-Portuguese Relations: A Festschrift.* Bangkok, 184–95.

Céberet, Claude. 1992. *Étude historique et critique du Journal du voyage de Siam de Claude Céberet, Envoyé extraordinaire du Roi en 1687 et 1688*, ed. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h. Paris.

Chandler, David. 1979. 'Royally Sponsored Human Sacrifices in Nineteenth Century Cambodia: the cult of nak tū Me Sa (Mahisāsuramardini) at Ba Phnom.' *JSS* 67: 54-62

Charnvit Kasetsiri. 1976. *The rise of Ayudhya: a history of Siam in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.* Kuala Lumpur and Oxford.

Chaumont, Alexandre de. 1733 [1686]. *Relation de l'ambassade de Monsieur le chevalier de Chaumont à la Cour du Roy de Siam, avec ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable durant son voyage*. La Haye.

Choisy, François-Timoléon de. 1687. *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686.* Paris.

Choisy, François-Timoléon de. 1995. *Journal du Voyage de Siam*, ed. Dirk van de Cruysse (Paris 1995), same as above, but includes the 'Mémoire sur le commerce des Indes Orientales', 1686 and the 'Mémoire pour server à l'histoire de Louis XIV'.

Collins, Steven. 1998. *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*. Cambridge.

Cook, Nerida. 1989. 'Astrology in Thailand: The Future and Recollection of the Past.' Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

Couto, Diogo do. 1778. *Da Ásia de Diogo do Couto dos Feitos, que os Portuguezes fizeram na conquitsa, e descubrimento das terras, e mares do Oriente. Década Sexta, Parte Segunda.* Lisbon.

Cushman, R., trans., and D. Wyatt, ed. 2001. 'Translating Thai Poetry: Cushman, and King Narai's "Long Song Prophecy for Ayutthaya". *JSS* 89.

Dhiravat na Pombejra. 1984. 'A Political History of Siam Under the Prasatthong Dynasty: 1629-1688'. PhD. thesis, University of London.

Dhiravat Na Pombejra. 1990. 'Crown trade and court politics in Ayutthaya during the reign of King Narai (1656-88)'. In J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers, eds, *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity: Rise and Demise*. Singapore.

Dhiravat na Pombejra, tr. 2015. "Khlong chaloem phrakiat somdet phra narai" [Eulogy of King Narai], pp. 61-140 in Winai Pongsripian and Trongjai Hutangkura, *Moradok khwam songjam haeng nopaburi si lawotayapura wa duai khlong chaloemphrakiat somdet phra narai lae jaruek boran haeng mueang lawo* [Legacy of Nopaburi Si Lawotayapura in the

eulogy of King Narai and ancient inscriptions of Lawo]. Bangkok.

Dhiravat na Pombejra and Michael Smithies. 2011. 'The Instructions given to the Siamese envoys sent to Portugal' in Smithies 2011.

Duindam, Jeroen. 2016. *Dynasties*: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800. Cambridge.

Dumont, Louis. 1980. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its implication*. Chicago.

Duncan, James S. 1990. *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom.* Cambridge.

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

Forbin, Claude de. 1991 [1729]. *Le voyage du comte de Forbin à Siam, 1685-8.* Cadeilhan, Zulma.

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

Fouser, Beth. 1996. *The Lord of the Golden Tower. King Prasat Thong and the Building of Wat Chaiwatthanaram.* Bangkok.

Geertz, Clifford. 1980. *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton.

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

Gesick, Lorraine. 1983. 'The Rise and Fall of King Taksin: A Drama of Buddhist Kingship'. In Gesick, *Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia,* New Haven, 87-105.

Gokhale, Balkrishna G. 1966. 'Early Buddhist Kingship'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, 1: 15-22.

Grabowsky, Volker. 2007. 'Buddhism, Power and Political Order in Pre-Twentieth Century Laos'. in Harris, 2007b: 121-42.

Guedes, Maria Ana Marques. 1994. *Interferência e Integração dos Portugueses na Birmânia, Ca. 1580-1630*. Lisbon.

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

Gyally-Pap, Peter. 2007. 'Reconstructing the Cambodian polity*:* Buddhism, kingship and the quest for legitimacy'. In Ian Harris, ed., *Buddhism, Power and Political Order,* London and New York.

Halikowski Smith, Stefan C.A. 2011. 'Floating European Clergy in Siam during the Years Immediately Prior to the National Revolution of 1688: The Letters of Giovanni Battista Morelli, O.F.M.'. In *Reinterpreting Indian Ocean Worlds: Essays in Honour of Kirti N. Chaudhuri,* edited by Stefan C. A. Halikowski Smith, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Harris, Ian. 2007a. 'Introduction – Buddhism, Power and politics in Theravada Buddhist lands', in Harris ed., 2007b, 1-9.

Harris, Ian, ed. 2007b. *Buddhism, Power and Political Order*. London.

Ishii, Yoneo. 1986. *Sangha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*. Honolulu.

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

Kemp, Jeremy. 1969. *Aspects of Siamese Kingshi*p *in the Seventeenth Century*. Bangkok.

Kulke, Hermann. 1993. *Kings and Cults: state formation and legitimation in India and South-east Asia.* New Delhi.

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

Lieberman, Victor. 2003. *Strange Parallels*: *Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, *Volume I*: *Integration on the Mainland*. Cambridge.

Loubère, Simon de La. 1987 [1691]. *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère "Du Royaume de Siam"*, ed. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h. Paris.

Love, Ronald S. 1999. 'Monarchs, Merchants, and Missionaries in Early Modern Asia: The Missions Étrangères in Siam, 1662-1684', *International History Review*, XXI/1.

Marcinkowski, M. Ismail. 2005. *From Isfahan to Ayutthaya: Contacts Between Iran and Siam in the 17th Century.* Singapore.

Matthee, Rudi. 2012. *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan.* London.

Melvin-Koushki, Matthew. 2018. 'Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy*'*. In *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, 353-75, Hoboken.

Mendes Pinto, Fernão. 1989. *The Travels of Mendes Pinto,* ed Rebecca D. Catz*.* Chicago.

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

Muhammad Rabi, Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim. 1972. *The Ship of Sulaiman*, translated from the Persian by John O'Kane. London.

Nidhi Eoseewong. 2005. *Pen and sail: literature and history in early Bangkok.* Chiang Mai.

Pieris, Paul, tr. 1908. *Religious intercourse between Ceylon and Siam in the eighteenth century*. Bangkok.

Pollock, Sheldon. 2006. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*: *Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Ranikhet.

Puett, Michael. 2002.) *To Become a God: cosmology, sacrifice, and self-divinization in early China.* Cambridge, MA.

RCA: The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya. Editor, David K. Wyatt. Translated by Richard D. Cushman. 2nd Edition, Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000.

Reid, Anthony. 1993. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, *1450-1680, Volume II: Expansion and Crisis*. New Haven.

Reynolds, Craig J. 2006. *Seditious Histories, Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts.* Seattle.

Ribadeneira, Marcelo de. 1970. *History of the Philippines and other Kingdoms* [1601], Volume 1, trans. Pacita Fernandez. Manila.

Rubiés*,* Joan-Pau. 2005. 'Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism*: Botero to Montesquieu*'. *Journal of Early Modern History.*

Sahlins, Marshall and David Graeber. 2017. *On Kings.* Chicago.

Sanson, Mr. 1695. Voyage ou l'état présent du Royaume de Perse. Paris.

Scubla, Lucien .2005. 'Sacred King, Sacrificial Victim, Surrogate Victim or Frazer, Hocart, Girard'. In Declan Quigley, ed., *The Character of Kingship*. Berg.

Sharrock, Peter. 2009. 'Garuda, Vajrapani, and religious change in Jayavarman VII's Angkor'. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40: 111-51.

Silber, Ivana. 1995. *Virtuosity, Charisma and Social Order: A Comparative Sociological Study of Monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Catholicism*. Cambridge.

Skilling, Peter. 2007. 'Kings, sangha and brahamns: ideology, ritual and power in pre-modern Siam'. In Ian Harris, ed., *Buddhism, Power and Political Order*, London.

Smithies, Michael, ed, trans. 1995. *Descriptions of Old Siam*. Oxford.

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

Strathern, Alan. 2007. *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*. Cambridge.

Strathern, Alan. 2019. *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History.* Cambridge.

Strathern, Alan. Forthcoming a. *Converting Kings: Kongo, Japan, Thailand, and Hawaii*

Compared 1450-1950. Cambridge.

Strathern, Alan. Forthcoming b. 'Tensions and Experimentations of Kingship: King Narai and his response to missionary overtures in the 1680s.'

Tachard, Guy. 1686. *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.

Tachard, Guy. 1689. *Seconde Voyage du Père Tachard et des Jésuites envoyez par le Roy au Royaume de Siam. Contenant diverses remarques d'Histoire, de Physique, de Géographie, & d'Astronomie*. Paris.

Tambiah, Stanley. 1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background.* Cambridge.

Tun Aung Chain, ed. 2005. *Chronicle of Ayutthaya: A translation of the Yodaya Yazawin*. Yangon.

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

Van Leeuwen, Richard. 2017. *Narratives of Kingship in Eurasian Empires, 1300–1800.* Leiden.

Van Vliet, Jeremias. 2005. *Van Vliet's Siam*, ed., and trans. Chris Baker, Dhiravat na Pombejra, Alfons van der Kraan, and David Wyatt. Chiang Mai.

Visudh Busayakul, trans. 2002. *The Diary of Kosa Pan (Thai Ambassador to France. June-July 1686)*, introduced by Dirk Van der Cruysse and edited by Michael Smithies. Chiang Mai.

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

Woodward, Hiram. 2001. 'Review: Practice and Belief in Ancient Cambodia: Claude Jacques, Angkor and the Devarāja Question'. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, 2: 249-261.

Woraporn Poopongpan. 2007. 'Thai Kingship during the Ayutthaya Period: A Note on Its Divine Aspects Concerning Indra'. *Silpakorn University International Journal* 7: 143-171.

Wright, Michael. 1990. 'Sacrifice and the Underworld: Death and Fertility in Siamese Myth and Ritual.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 78, 1: 43-53.

Wyatt David. 2001a. *Thailand: A Short History*. Chiang Mai.

Wyatt, David. 1982. 'The Subtle Revolution of King Rama I of Siam'. In Wyatt and Alexander Woodside, eds, *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays of Southeast Asian Thought,* Yale.

Wyatt, David. 2001b. 'Relics, Oaths and Politics in Thirteenth-Century Siam'. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32: 3-65.