

REFERENCES TO PĀLI IN 17TH-CENTURY
FRENCH BOOKS

1. 17th-century French books on Thailand

Mr K.R. Norman points out in *Pāli Literature*¹ that the term "Pāli" was used in France in the second half of the 17th century to designate the dialect of Middle Indo-Ariyan which is found in the texts of the Theravadin Buddhists. He cites Simon de La Loubère's *Du royaume de Siam* (1691), as this book was mentioned by Eugène Burnouf and Charles Lassen as being the first mention of the term Pāli.² Many books on Thailand were published in France during the second half of the 17th century, however, and, as we shall see, Pāli was mentioned by the French in several books before 1691. (The French generally write the word as they heard it pronounced, Bali or Baly [feminine: Balie, Balye]. The English translator of La Loubère's book uses the various forms indifferently.)

In searching for the earliest use in Europe of the word "Pāli" to designate a language, I was struck by the great variety of information that was available three hundred years ago in Europe concerning Thailand, Buddhism as a religion, and Buddhism as it was practised then in Thailand. The following list gives the publications pertinent to our discussion in chronological order with the abbreviations used below.

[Bourges] Jacques de Bourges. *Relation du voyage de monseigneur l'évêque de Beryte vicaire apostolique du royaume de la Cochinchine, Par la Turquie, la Perse, les Indes, &c. jusqu'au Royaume de Siam & autres lieux.* (Paris: Denys Bechet, 1666; 1668, 1683; Italian ed.: 1677).

[Relation (1674)] *Relation des missions des évêques françois aux royaumes de Siam, de la Cochincine, de Camboye, & du Tonkin, & Divisé en quatre parties.* (Paris: Pierre Le Petit, Edme Couterot, Charles Angot, 1674).

[Relation (1680)] *Relation des Missions et des voyages des évêques vicaires apostoliques, et de leurs ecclésiastiques, és Années 1672, 1673, 1674. & 1675.* (Paris: Charles Angot, 1680).

[Tachard (1686)] Guy Tachard. *Voyage de Siam, des pères jésuites, envoyez par le roy aux Indes & à la Chine ...* (Paris: Seneuze, Horthemels, 1686; Amsterdam, 1687; Dutch ed.: 1687; English ed.: 1688).

[Choisy] L'abbé de Choisy. *Journal du voyage de Siam, fait en 1685 & 1686.* (Paris, 1686; 1687, 1690; Amsterdam, 1687; English ed.: 1687; modern ed.: Maurice Garçon, ed., Paris: Duchartre & Van Buggenhoudt, 1930; references are to the modern edition).

[Chaumont] Alexandre de Chaumont. *Relation de*

l'ambassade de M^r le Chevalier de Chaumont à la cour du roi de Siam. Avec ce qui c'est passé de plus remarquable durant son voiage. (Paris: Arnoul Seneuze & Daniel Horthemels, 1686; 1687; English ed. 1687).

[Gervaise] Nicolas Gervaise. **Histoire naturelle et politique du royaume de Siam. ...** (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1688; 1689; Eng. ed. by Herbert Stanley O'Neill [Bangkok: Siam Observer Press, 1928]).

[Tachard (1689)] Guy Tachard. **Second voyage du Père Tachard et des Jésuites envoyez par le roy au Royaume de Siam.** (Paris: Daniel Horthemels, 1689).

[La Loubère] Simon de La Loubère. **Du royaume de Siam par Monsieur de La Loubere envoyé extraordinaire du Roy auprès du Roy de Siam en 1687. & 1688.** (Paris: La veuve de Jean Baptiste Coignard, Jean Baptiste Coignard [fils], 1691; Eng. trans. ("done out of French"), 1693 [repr. with an intro. by David K. Wyatt, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969]; Amsterdam, 1714). References with volume and page number are to the first French ed. References with page numbers only are to the English edition. I generally follow the 17th-century English translation, although spellings, use of capitals, and some words have been modernized.

2. French-Thai relations in the second half of the 17th century.

The second half of the 17th century was a period when there was a lot of interaction between France and Thailand. The recently founded Missions étrangères in France sent many missionaries to the East in hopes of spreading Christianity. Thailand proved to be an important country to them because of religious tolerance. Jacques de Bourges wrote, "I do not believe there is any country in the world where so many religions are to be found and where their practice is better tolerated." [Bourges, p. 164.] The French established a seminary to train natives of various countries, including Tonkin, Thailand, China, Cochinchina, Manilla, Bengal and Pegu.³

The French government had hopes of replacing the English and Dutch in Thailand in order to further commercial trade. The situation seemed very promising for a time. The king of Thailand had raised a man of Greek origin, Constant Phaulkon, to a high position in the court. Phaulkon converted to Catholicism and the missionaries in Thailand had high hopes that the king would be converted as well--mistaking his tolerance and curiosity, perhaps, for an inclination towards Christianity.

Ambassadors were sent from Thailand to France in 1684 and 1686. Louis XIV responded with two embassies to Thailand, sending M. de Vaudricourt, M. de Chaumont and the Abbé de

Choisy in 1684 and M. de La Loubère and M. Ceberet in 1687. The curiosity aroused in France by the Thai ambassadors meant that there was a demand for books on Thailand, and this demand was certainly met by the books listed above--and other books as well, not mentioned here, as they do not contain any mention of Pāli.

The French were not able to install their merchants in Thailand, however. The mandarins in the court of Thailand had long been jealous of Phaulkon's power. La Loubère had brought French troops which Phaulkon stationed in Bangkok. As soon as the French ambassador had left for France, the king was deposed by a pretender to the throne named Phetraja, Phaulkon was executed and the French troops in Bangkok were forced to go to Pondicherry. The French missionaries were put into prison. All hopes of the French, both religious and commercial, were ended with regards to Thailand.⁴

3. The earliest mention of Pāli to designate a language.

A letter written by M. Chevreuil, after three years spent as a missionary in Cambodia (1665-1668), gives a good idea of the difficulties the missionaries faced and the approach they hoped would help them in their mission. He says that he has not made one convert to Christianity, "because, search as I may, I have not been able to find an interpreter who knows the religious terms well enough to enable me to explain our [religion] in an intelligible manner." [Relation (1674), p. 146.] He hopes he will be able to visit the important temple of Angkor ("Onco"), which is eight days' journey from the village he is in, where there are learned monks from Thailand, Pegu, Laos and Tenasserim, etc. He says that the language of the monks (Talapoins) "is as different from the local tongue as Latin is from the other European languages." [Relation (1674), pp. 144f.] He feels that the best way to turn them away from their idolotry is to show them the mistakes they have made in astrology (i.e., astronomy) and anatomy. [Relation (1674), pp. 145f.]⁵

Another letter in the same book mentions a missionary who was able to learn Thai and the religious terms. M. l'évêque de Berythe (Pierre Marie Lambert) writes in 1667 that M. Laneau can read, write and speak Thai. "He has had the advantage of being able to make himself understood in religious matters, having learned the terms during the period when he lived with the priests of the idols [i.e., the monks]." [Relation (1674), p. 9.]

M. Laneau was one of three missionaries left in Thailand by M. l'évêque de Berythe, and it is in connection with him that the earliest mention of Pāli that I have been able to find was made. In recounting the events of the year 1672, it is mentioned that M. Laneau went to a village which was

seventy miles from the royal city (Ayuthia) between August 2 and September 11, 1671. "[M. Laneau] hastened to finish his study of the languages of Siam and Baly, the latter being absolutely necessary in order to acquire a perfect knowledge of the religion of the country. And that is why he wrote a Grammar and a Dictionary of both languages. He translated into Siamese the Christian prayers and doctrine, and wrote in the same language a short work divided into four parts--the first dealing with the existence of God, the second with the mysteries, the trinity and the incarnation, the third with the marks of the true religion, and the fourth with the manner of refuting the errors of the religion of the country." [*Relation* (1680), p. 58.]

The grammars and dictionaries do not seem to have survived. But a translation into Thai of the gospel of Luke with a preface and postface in Pāli is to be found in the archives of the Missions étrangères, Paris.⁶ This translation was finished in 1685. Numerous other references to missionaries learning Asian languages are found,⁷ but only M. Laneau seems to have studied Pāli. This is one of the reasons given for electing him to the post of Evêque de Metellopolis in September 1673.⁸ "Indeed, with regards to the kingdom of Siam, where it was appropriate that the new bishop should be normally in residence, we thought he had the advantage over the other missionary [considered] in several respects, knowing the languages that are used there," as well as being highly regarded by the king and the people. [*Relation* (1680), p. 109.]

4. Buddhism in Thailand as seen by the French

I think that it is probable that much of the information in the later French books concerning Buddhism, especially with regards to texts, can be traced to M. Laneau. Although some of the information given by the various authors is similar, there is great variety in the observations made and the stories quoted or practices described. At times, one author will copy information from an earlier work, but only La Loubère uses a wide variety of sources.⁹ And, unlike the others, La Loubère generally cites his sources. He does not say who translated the Buddhist texts he gives, however. In a note to the reader at the beginning of the second volume, La Loubère says, "I had almost no hand in this volume aside from assembling the parts. Some of these are translations which I have made; for some others, about all I did was write with my pen when the substance was dictated to me."

An examination of the discussion of Buddhism in these works is of interest not only for the information and misinformation available in Europe at the time, but also for the picture given of Buddhism as practised in Thailand in the 17th

century and of the response in Thailand to the Christian missionaries.

For example, one of the reasons the missionaries had great difficulty in converting the Thai was that the Thai identified Jesus with Devadatta. When they learned that Jesus performed miracles and that he was crucified, they assumed he had done an evil action to merit this punishment which resembled the description of the torture inflicted on Devadatta after his death.¹⁰

A detailed examination of all the French texts would be beyond the scope of this paper, however. It is difficult to determine how much of what is reported is accurate. A Buddhist text in Thailand may have differed from the canonical version, a poor translation may have been made, or the French version may be an interpretation more than a translation.

Certainly La Loubère was aware of how difficult it was to obtain information. He says, concerning his discussion of his attempts to obtain a copy of civil laws which were in three volumes, "It would have been necessary to remain for a longer time in Thailand with fewer affairs. Here, then, is what I have been able to learn as being certain in this matter, without the aid of these books, and in a country where everyone is afraid to speak. The greatest proof of the bondage of the Thai people is that they do not dare open their mouth about anything concerning their country." [*La Loubère*, I, p. 314; p. 81.]

Tachard calls into question not only the accuracy of what other Frenchmen have written or will write, but also warns that books on Thailand can have undesirable consequences for the mission there. In a letter dated July 26, 1688, he writes to the king's confessor, Père de La Chaise,¹¹ "I must suggest a case to your reverence, concerning which you may judge it necessary to make some early arrangements and speak to his majesty [Louis XIV]. M. de La Loubère has collected reports from all over on everything that came into his imagination, in order to present them to the public. He has only consulted people who are very badly informed and with very bad intentions. I have cause to fear that this account, improvised on the basis of such bad reports, will have very unfortunate consequences in Thailand, where they were very unhappy with Chevalier de Chaumont's report--so much so that the king of Thailand, having read it, translated into his language by the [Thai] ambassadors, blamed them very severely for not having beseeched his majesty [Louis XIV] to stop the sale of it. Your reverence can judge whether the same precaution should not be used with regards to the letters that the missionaries write to Rome."

Tachard goes on to accuse the Abbé de Lionne of having a personal vendetta against him, influencing the Evêque de Metellopolis and La Loubère, writing to Rome to denounce him. He says that the Abbé de Choisy, the Abbé de Lionne and M. Vachet took all his papers out of his chest on the boat and sent copies of them to Rome.

There is ample evidence that Tachard was every bit as meddlesome as he accuses the others of being, and that his actions did nothing to facilitate French-Thai relations.¹²

5. References to Pāli.

The first references to Pāli are rather perfunctory. Tachard [(1686), p. 378] calls attention to the importance of understanding Pāli in order to understand Buddhism: "The Thai religion is very strange. It cannot be perfectly understood except through the books written in the Bali language, which is a scholarly language and which almost no one understands aside from some of their doctors. Moreover, these books do not always agree with each other."

Chaumont [p. 141], like many of the writers, suggests the monks have ulterior motives: "When they preach, they urge the giving of alms to the monks, and they think themselves very learned when they cite some of the passages in their old books in the Baly language, which is like our Latin. This language is very lovely and emphatic. It has conjugations as in Latin."

Choisy [p. 246] gives a slightly different version of the same passage found in Chaumont: "When they preach, they urge the practice of virtue and the giving of alms to the monks. They seem very learned in their sermons when they cite some passage from their old books, which are in the Bali language. This Bali is like our Latin." As can be seen, Choisy's version is more complementary, and the slight variants between the two versions could well be due to both men having heard the same explanation but having interpreted what they heard differently.

Gervaise includes more details concerning Pāli than the earlier writers. In speaking of a foot-imprint in a rock [p. 181], he says, "They call it 'Pra-Bata' [Pada] in the Baly language, that is to say, 'the divine foot.'" In another passage we learn that the king of Thailand, concerned because the study of Pāli was dying out, decreed that monks who could not recite the texts would be forced to work [p. 198]: "After the meal, the most learned spend the rest of the day learning the Baly language, which is highly esteemed in this kingdom and absolutely necessary for the monks. They must at least know how to read and explain a little to be ordained Badloüan.¹³ This training had been neglected for several years and most of the monks did not even know the letters. The king cured this

confusion four years ago."

Gervaise then goes on to describe the instruction given in the afternoon to the novices by a learned monk [p. 199]: "He teaches them to read and write in Thai, the history and customs of the country, with the Baly letters and grammar. This language, very different from Thai, has something of those of Europe. It is the only one of the oriental languages which has declensions, conjugations and tenses." He also remarks that pieces of paper with "several Baly letters" marked on them are used to cure illnesses.

In his second book, Tachard speaks of two sorts of Thai language: the language of the people, which the Portugese call *Lingua de Fora* and the language used by the Mandarins, the palace and for the monks, *Lingua de Dentro*. He goes on to explain the third language of the country, Pāli [p. 214]: "They begin their prayers thus: *Sâ tou sâ* [Sadhu],¹⁴ an expression in Bali, which is a third type of language peculiar to the learned and which is learned in Siam as Latin is in Europe. It will not be irrelevant to remark that almost all their prayers are in the Bali language, known only to the most capable monks, because, they say, a language which must set forth so many mysteries should be mysterious itself, and not be used except by a few people in the elite in order not to be degraded."

The most detailed description of Pāli is given by La Loubère. In his second volume he gives Thai characters for writing Thai and Pāli.¹⁵ He discusses at length the order of the consonants and the pronunciation of the consonants and vowels and their various combinations.

La Loubère also speculates about the origins of Pāli. [La Loubère, I, p. 536; p. 139.] He says he consulted M. Herbelot concerning any common features between Pāli and Arabic, Turkish and Persian. He was told that ancient Persian was called "Pahalevi or Pahali [Pahlavi]" and that the Persians would not make any difference between Pahali and Bahali.¹⁶

Also of interest is La Loubère's attempt to explain what he considers to be superstitious veneration of the monks. His theory is based on an explanation of how the instruction was originally given and how the texts came to be corrupted. [La Loubère, I, pp. 517f.; pp. 134f.] He seems to suggest that the teachings came to Thailand from India via China. Originally the texts were in poetry set to music. As men grew weary of singing the same thing and as they lost the meaning of the songs, they stopped singing them and looked for commentaries on the verses. The magistrates let other men make the commentaries and these men imposed their beliefs on the people, adding texts which were to their own advantage. But the point of particular interest for our discussion here is the mention of music. "The monks are therefore obliged to supply the ancient music," La Loubère continues, "and to explain

their Bali books to the people in an audible voice." [La Loubère, I, p. 522; p. 135.]

In recounting the daily occupations of the monks, La Loubère describes their chanting.¹⁷ [La Loubère, I, pp. 448f.; p. 117.] They go to the temple the first thing in the morning. "There they sing or recite out of the Bali, and what they sing is written on the leaves of a tree somewhat longish and fastened at one of the ends.¹⁸ . . . The people do not have a prayer book. The posture of the monks while they sing is to sit cross-legged and to continually fan themselves, so that their fan goes or comes at each syllable which they pronounce. And they pronounce them all with equal measure (à temps égaux) on the same tone (sur le même ton)." In the evening, they sing in the temple for another two hours. La Loubère also remarks that they have rosaries with one-hundred-eight beads, on which they recite certain Pāli words, but he does not know their significance. [La Loubère, I, p. 443; p. 116.]

La Loubère says that in addition to instructing the young, the monks "explain their Doctrine to the people as it is written in their Bali books. They preach the day after every new- and every full-moon, and the people are very constant in the temples." During the rainy season "they preach every day, from six in the morning till dinner time, and from one in the afternoon till five in the evening. The preacher is seated cross-legged in a high chair and several monks relay one another in this office." [La Loubère, I, p. 440; p. 115.]

Further details concerning the discourses given by the monks are found in a comment made on one of the rules for the monks. The rule La Loubère gives is not found in the Pāṭimokkha, and, like many of the other rules, seems to be based on a misunderstanding by the translator. It says, "A monk who in preaching does not speak Bali, sins." [La Loubère, II, p. 42; p. 159.] "This maxim is not well rendered by the translator," La Loubère comments. "Their way of preaching is to read out of the Bali, where they ought to change nothing, but they must comment on it in Thai, and say nothing which is not in the Bali."

La Loubère gives a slightly different account of the Pāli exams than Gervaise. According to La Loubère [I, p. 439; p. 115], the purpose of the exams is to keep too many men from escaping the six-months' service due to the king by becoming monks. "To diminish the number of these privileged persons [the monks], he causes them to be examined from time to time concerning their knowledge with respect to the Bali language and its books. When we arrived in this country, he had just reduced several thousand to the secular condition, because they had not been found learned enough." The exams were given by a young layman, Oc-Louang Souraçac, the son

of the keeper of the elephants. But the forest monks (as distinguished from the monks in the city) refused to submit to examination under a layman and insisted on being tested by one of their superiors.

In conclusion, we can say that for Europeans the initial motivation behind learning Pāli was to gain a sufficient knowledge of religious terminology in order to translate the missionaries' message. The first usage of the knowledge of Pāli was to translate Buddhist texts in order to attempt to refute their teachings. With La Loubère there is already an attempt to study the languages and religions in China, India and Southeast Asia in a more objective manner. But even he includes a chapter to advise on how to gradually introduce the Christian religion without shocking those of other beliefs.

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NOTES

¹Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983, pp. 1f.

²*Essai sur le pali* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1826), p. 6.

³See letter dated 1682, Bibliothèque nationale, ms. fr. nouv. acq. 9380, f. 34^v, and *Relation* (1674), pp. 3f.

⁴For a brief outline of French-Thai relations, see Maurice Garçon's introduction [Choisy, pp. xix-xxii, xxix-xl]. For more detailed discussion see Lucien Lanier, *Etude historique sur les relations de la France et du Royaume de Siam de 1662 à 1703* (Versailles: E. Aubert, 1883) and E.W. Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London: R.A.S., 1940).

⁵A very similar observation was made by Robert Knox concerning Sri Lanka in a book published in 1681: "Their Books are only of their Religion and of Physick. Their chief Arts are Astronomy and Magick. They have a language something differing from the vulgar tongue (like Latin to us) which their books are writ in." (R. Knox, *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon* . . . 1681, p. 109; see mod. ed. by James Ryan [Glasgow: J. MacLehose & Sons, 1911], p. 175, which is reproduced in *The Ceylon Historical Journal*, VI [1956-57].) This reference was noted by A.J. Edmunds, "A Buddhist Bibliography," *JPTS*, 1902-3, p. 34.

⁶AME 1074, 2 vols., 354 pp., 177pp.

⁷For example, M. Langlois who taught in the Thai seminary mentions in 1672 that he already knew Italian which facilitated learning Portuguese on his trip to the East. He arrived in Thailand in July 1671, studied Thai until December 1671, "enough to read and write it and even to understand and speak it." He made every effort to learn the languages of Tonkin and Cochín-China. [*Relation* (1680), p. 66.]

⁸The other candidate was M. Chevreuil who had come to Thailand in 1671 after having been arrested by the Portuguese in Cambodia, sent from there to Macao and then to the Inquisition in Goa.

⁹Le sieur de l'Isle, in his *Relation historique de Siam* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1684) lists nineteen books used in writing his book, and carefully notes in the text the source of his information. But he did not go to Thailand himself, and his book is not very up-to-date in comparison with the works soon to be published.

¹⁰See Tachard (1686), p. 407; Chaumont, p. 137; Choisy, p. 245; La Loubère, pp. 152, 156. The French also understood the Thai to say that Devadatta was the Buddha's brother (rather than his cousin), and La Loubère [I, pp. 524f.; p. 136] says that though the name of the Buddha's mother was often written Many-ya, it was pronounced Maria, and that this contributed to the belief Devadatta was Jesus.

¹¹Bibl. nat., ms. fr. 24427, f. 39.

¹²See for example the long report concerning him written by Ceberes, Bibl. nat., ms. fr. nouv. acq. 9380, ff. 216^r-267^v. Maurice Garçon in his introduction [Choisy, pp. xxvi-xxxix] describes Tachard's attempts to give French troops to Phaulkon in order to rule Thailand.

¹³Gervaise gives a list of grades within the monkhood (p. 184): Ocnen [novice], Picou [Bhikkhu], Badloüang [sic], Chaucou, and Sancrât [the highest grade]. La Loubère (I, p. 434; p. 113) says the novices were called Nens (=Ocnen). He also comments on Gervaise's list [La Loubère, I, pp. 454f; pp. 118f.], saying that Balouang is written Pat-loüang in Thai and is only a title of respect, one which is used in addressing the Jesuits as well as the monks. He says he has not heard the term Picou used, but rather Tcháu-cou (=Chaucou). This last term was explained to him as meaning Talapoin (monk) in Thai. There may be distinctions among the monks which the people he consulted did not know of ("tho' otherwise expert"). La Loubère (I, p. 435; p. 114) says the term Sancrat is used of the most honourable of the superiors of the monasteries (who are called Tcháu-vat, "Lord or master of the convent").

¹⁴Compare this observation in La Loubère (I, p. 440; p. 115) which is probably more accurate, "The people approve the Doctrine which is preached to them in these Bali words, *sa-tou-sa*, which signifies, *it is so Sir* (oüy monseigneur), or in other Thai words which amount to the same thing.

¹⁵[La Loubère, plates after II, p. 98; plates after p. 176.] The English plates are slightly inaccurate. The Pāli alphabets are reproduced in Burnouf & Lassen, plate 1.

¹⁶La Loubère's authority is Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville, who published his *Bibliothèque orientale* in 1697.

¹⁷Other writers mention chanting, without directly referring to Pāli: [Tachard (1689), pp. 181, 183:] "On entering [the building] we found a

monk who was saying his prayers before the pagoda--that is to say, the little statue placed on a very high table. He sang without making the least pause, and waved his fan with so much activity you would have said he was possessed. . . . Three monks came the next day before daybreak and began to sing before the idol with extraordinary modesty. I do not know if our presence inspired them to display this respect. They were seated on the floor, their hands joined, a little elevated, and intoned (psalmodierent) in this way for almost an hour, singing together without breaking off, and without looking at anything other than their idol." [Chaumont, p. 135, 140:] "The occupation of the monks is to read, sleep, eat, sing and ask for alms . . . What they sing in the pagodas consists of mythical stories, intermingled with some phrases . . ." [Gervaise, pp. 196f.:] "[The morning office] lasts for an hour. They sing it in a pleasing tone which resembles the intoning (la psalmodie) of Roman chant. They are divided into two choirs. They are seated cross-legged on mats on either side of the temple, facing each other. One monk, who is like the choir master (le choriste), begins, his side continues, and those on the other side respond, saying the following verset."

¹⁸Bourges describes their books as written on thin paper pasted together for support and folded several times "rather like the folding screens in our bedrooms." [Bourges, p. 157.]