

French Missionaries' Evangelizing Role and Their Efforts in Composing and Translating Thai Texts in Seventeenth-Century Siam

Bernard Wirth

The missionaries sent to Siam by the Propaganda Fide in the second half of the seventeenth century, received from Rome new instructions for their missions: “*Instructio Vicariorum Apostolicorum ad Regna Sinarum, Tonchini et Cocincines proficiscentium*”¹ (Instructions for the Apostolic Vicars leaving for the Kingdoms of China, Tonkin and Cochinchina).

This new mission’s charter contains special directives :

“What is more absurd than bringing to the Chinese people’ France, Spain, Italy or any other country of Europe? Don’t bring our countries to their place, bring only with you Faith. ... In order to help the progress of knowledge and taste for the Sacred Scriptures in these countries, it is necessary to translate into their maternal language a big number of Greek or Latin books of the Doctors of the Church or other religious scholars and authors. To achieve

¹ GUENNOU, Jean, l’Instruction de 1659 aux Vicaires Apostoliques français, in **Les Missions catholiques**, nouvelle série No 74, 1959, pp. 78-79. He studies the history of the successive editions of this document.

this end, look actively for the missionary, who, by his perfect knowledge of the two languages and his understanding of the doctrine, is up to this job.”²

In the new mission in Siam, if the majority of the missionaries tried their best to carry out these instructions by studying the Siamese language and local traditions, and also by translating foreign books into Thai, no one was more outstanding than the scholar Louis Laneau³, who performed this duty with exceptional gift and passion.

Father Pocquet, Laneau's companion in the latter's last years, gives his testimony:

“The best service from Mgr. Laneau to the missions, especially the one in Siam, are the numerous books he has written; the prelate seemed to be born for the study and perhaps was one of the most erudite bishops at that time. He took great pains studying till the end of his life.

As soon as he arrived in this Kingdom, he applied himself to the Siamese and Pali languages. He attended the Pagodas for nearly eight years. He never neglected to do anything that might improve the learning of these two languages, the Siamese religion, their traditions, their prejudices, and all kinds of knowledge that would help him refute their false religion and make them believe in our faith.

With this object, he has written numerous books... Even the King of Siam took pleasure in reading some of them, these being slowly widely obtainable” in Siam.”⁴

² “Instructio Vicariorum Apostolicorum ad regna Cinarum, Tonchini, et cocincines profociscentium” CHAPPOULIE, Henri, Rome et les missionnaires d’Indochine au XVIIe siècle, tome I, Bloud et Gay, Paris, 1943, document 5, pp.392 - 402.

³ Louis LANEAU arrived in Siam as a young priest in 1663. In 1667, he produced a summary of the Christian doctrine in Siamese. Six years later, in 1673, he was promoted Apostolic Vicar of Siam with the title of Mgr. of Metellopolis. He died in Siam on 16 March 1696.

⁴ Archives M.E.P., volume 863, pp.459-461, letter from F. Louis POCQUET, dated 27 December 1696.

In 1687, Mgr. Laneau sent to the Propaganda Fide a list of books written by the missionaries up to that time, not only those in Siamese, but also in Peguan (Mon) and, notably, in Pali, the latter language being, as a matter of fact, considered the sacred language by all the nations professing the Buddhist faith. In the commentary preceding the list, Mgr. Laneau expressed his wish that all the books in Pali be used in the future, not only in this Kingdom, but also in the Kingdoms of Cambodia, Pegu, Ava, Aracan and Laos.

Mgr. Laneau to the Propaganda, 1687,
Archives M.E.P., volume 879, p. 963.
Original version in Latin

1	Quidam brevis tractatus de vera Divinitate et attributis divinis.	A certain brief tract concerning the true Divinity and divine attributes.
2	De mysterio Incarnationis ac fidei necessitate.	On the mystery of the incarnation and the necessity of faith.
3	De praeparatione ad Baptismum.	On preparation for Baptism.
4	De Eucharistia.	On the Eucharist.
5	De Poenitentia.	On Penance.
6	Dialogus de praecipuis fidei mysteriis, duo aut tria volumina librorum siamensium continens.	Dialogue on special mysteries of faith, comprising 2 or 3 volumes in Siamese books.
7	Dialogus contra cultum idolorum.	Dialogue against the cult of idols.
8	Alter Dialogus paulo fusior, atque vocibus linguae bali, quae ab omnibus alta, imo et sacra aestimatur, sed a doctis solummodo intellecta, et exornatior, in quo explicantur et probantur mysteria fidei, et religionis christianae motiva, ac signa probabilitatis ad longum exponuntur, continetque septem aut octo volumina siamensia.	Another Dialogue, which is written in Pali, the sacred language understood only by the learned. The text is somewhat elaborated. It explains the mysteries of faith and the principles of the Christian religion and sets forth at length the signs of probability; It comprises 7 or 8 volumes in Siamese.
9	Alter Dialogus contra religionem siamensium, eodem quo prior stylo.	Another Dialogue against the Siamese religion in the same style as before.

10	Duo priores illi Dialogi in linguam peguensem conversi sunt.	The previous two (2) dialogues translated into the Peguanian language.
11	Catechismus, lingua peguensi, in quo exponuntur mysteria fidei et praeparationes ad suscipienda sacramenta necessariae.	A Catechism in the Peguanian language, which explains the mysteries of faith and the preparation necessary for receiving the sacraments.
12	Historia creationis mundi, ac redēptionis generis humani, in formam dialogorum, lingua peguensi	History of the creation of the world, and the redēption of the human race, in the form of a dialogue, in the Peguanian language.
13	Explicatio sacrificii missae, lingua siamensi volumen unum.	Explanation of the sacrifice of the Mass, one volume in the Siamese language.
14	Explicatio rosarii, lingua siamensi.	Explanation of the Rosary, in the Siamese language.
15	De amore et cognitione Dei, ex variis S. Augustini locis excerptum, lingua siamensi volumen unum.	On the love and knowledge of God, taking various passages of St. Augustine. One volume in the Siamese language.
16	Explicatio primorum capitum Genesis, lingua bali, atque synopsis historica Veteris Testamenti, lingua siamensi volumen unum.	Explanation of the first chapters of Genesis, in the Pali language, and with an historical synopsis of the old Testament, in the Siamese language, one volume.
17	Explicatio Genesis paulo fusior atque historiae Bibliae lingua siamensi duo aut tria volumina.	Explanation of Genesis which is a little more developed, and of Bible history, in the Siamese language, in 2 or 3 volumes.
18	Historia D. N. Jesu Christi ex Evangelii desumpta, quatuordecim volumina lingua siamensi, sed paulo altiori stylo, idest vocibus bali intermixta.	History of Our Lord Jesus Christ, taken from the Gospels, 14 volumes in the Siamese language, but in a little more elevated style, that is, with Pali terms included.

19	Concordantia Evangeliorum, in purum bali, sed nondum perfecta, habenturque quatuor aut quinque volumina.	A concordance of the Gospels, in pure Pali, but not yet finished, and containing 4 or 5 volumes.
20	Alia Concordantia Evangeliorum fere usque ad Passionem D. N. Jesu Christ, lingua bali simul et siamensi, id est ea quae historica sunt, lingua siamensi, verba vero Domini aut aliorum, lingua bali pura exponuntur.	Another Concordance of the Gospels almost up to the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in both Pali and Siamese, that is, the historical passages in Siamese, but the words of the Lord and of others are given in pure Pali idiom.
21	Preces recitare ab omnibus solitae, tum lingua siamensi tum puguensi, sed litaniae B. Mariae nonnisi idiomate bali potuerunt explicari.	Prayers habitually recited by all, in both Siamese and Peguanian, but the litany or the Blessed Mary could only be explained in the Pali idiom.
22	Catechismus historicus a D. abbate de Fleury, lingua gallica conscriptus et in linguam siamensem vulgarem conversus, decem aut duodecim volumina, sed necdum perfectus.	The historical catechism of Abbe de Fleury, written in French and translated into the common Siamese language, in 10 or 12 volumes but not yet finished.
23	Explicatio sphaerae, lingua siamensi, ad confutandas errores gentilium de systemate mundi qui in libris religionis eorum continentur.	Explanation of the spheres, in Siamese, to refute the errors of the gentiles concerning the system of the world, which is contained in their religious books.
24	Varii tractatus pro rege; v. g. de Alexandro.	Various treatises for the king, for example on Alexander.
25	Grammatica siamensis et bali, quae postrema omnium difficillima est.	Siamese and Pali Grammar, the latter being the more difficult of the two.
26	Dictionarium siamense et puguense, sed hoc postremum nondum absolutum est.	Siamese and Peguanian dictionary but the latter is not yet complete.

When we read the list of all these books written by the missionaries, we should not forget that up till 1687 the men who arrived from France with the Apostolic Vicars had been working for only about 25 years. During this period, while about 60 missionaries passed through Siam, 20 of them went on to Cochinchina, 10 to China, and the same

number to Tonkin, leaving about 20 men behind in Siam. Interestingly, all of them were never ever together. Between 1662-1670, only 3-5 were present; between 1670-1675, 6-8; between 1675-1680, 10-13; and in the last period, around 15. Even with such a small group, they were able to take care of the Siam Mission's responsibilities and its seminary administration. The following remarks are made to help us appreciate the French missionaries' translation efforts.

On the list mentioned above, there are three pieces of translation which refer to the Gospel (18, 19, 20); one being the history of Jesus Christ taken from the Gospel and presented in 14 booklets in Siamese with Pali glossaries; the other two a Concordance of the Gospel in pure Pali and another Concordance with the historical passages in Siamese and the words of the Lord in pure Pali. The first one is kept in the M.E.P. archives⁵ with 534 pages in its original version, the 14 booklets are bound together in one volume. It is the first book of the Gospel ever translated by Mgr. Laneau in the years 1684-1685. This manuscript is now well-known in Thailand, thanks to a new edition in 1981, copies of which was presented to the Royal Family and several leading libraries and archives.⁶

The presentation, in the new edition, is on two large pages. The left page contains the exact reproduction of the original manuscript, whereas the right page is divided into two columns; one containing a literal transcription, word by word, in current Thai letters, and the other presenting a modern Thai translation of the text. The introduction, which is in Pali, occupies one page, and the conclusion, in "Romanised" Thai, two pages.

The second group of documents I would like to bring to attention are the Dialogues. There are references to five books in Mgr. Laneau's list; the first two (6-7) of these are written in the Siamese language, with the next two, being markedly interspersed with Pali words (8-9), and the last one, being a Peguanian translation (10). These books were

⁵ When we speak about the archives of the missionaries M.E.P., we refer to their Centre des Archives de la Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris, rue du Bac, Paris; all the manuscripts used for the main part of this article come from this center.

⁶ Curiously enough, this splendid new edition contains no references to the original edition and year; the book consulted belongs to the archives of the Bangkok diocese, and was displayed for several months in an exhibition about the early church in Thailand organised at "Raan Phu Waan" the pastoral center of the diocese.

then of great use for the missionaries as evidenced in one of F. Pocquet's letters.

"Mgr. Laneau has composed several dialogues in the form of a conversation between a Catholic hermit and his Buddhist counterpart. In some dialogues, the false religion of the Siamese is refuted and dismissed. In others, the Catholic Faith is clearly exposed and explained. Sometimes Mgr. Laneau answers directly all the objections and difficulties, some of which are not as insignificant or negligible as people usually think..."⁷

The two Dialogues composed by Mgr. Laneau that the author of this article knows of are now kept in the archives of the M.E.P. in Paris. They are in Siamese and correspond to No. 6 and 7 in the list. Each of these documents is accompanied by a marginal note in Italian, the language chosen for international editions.

Dialogue 1

A hermit has a discussion with a Talapoin (a Mon term for a Buddhist monk) and explains to him how false his Siamese religion is, quoting all the nonsense, absurdities and contradictions in their books.

Mgr. of Metellopolis, Apostolic Vicar of Siam.

This was the first instruction book distributed to pagans and catechumens so as to inculcate them with the knowledge of the true religion.

Dialogue 2

An urban scholar instructs a countryman about the existence of God and the only true religion with its symbols through very forceful reasons and proofs. Christianity is the only true religion and its mysteries are well explained. There are even answers to all Siamese objections against our Holy Religion.

Mgr. of Metellopolis, Apostolic Vicar of Siam.

⁷ Archives M.E.P., volume 863, p. 465.

This document is the second instruction book given to pagans and the catechumens. It was a means of helping them to discover the truth of our Holy Faith..

These two dialogues have been translated into French from the Siamese manuscripts by F. Edmond Pezet.⁸ In a commentary he notes down that the two interlocutors are given the title of “CHAOKRU”⁹. The first is called ARANYA-VASI, dwelling in the forest, the second, GAMA-VASI, dwelling in the village. The first represents the missionary criticising the Siamese religion. Evidently, he is not a Buddhist, but he assumes the role of an ascetic, or a hermit living in the forest, or a RISHI monotheist, who is able to guide the Buddhist Talapoin towards the correct monotheist Faith. The second interlocutor, on the other hand, represents a Talapoin (Buddhist monk) living in a village Pagoda.

Another comment is that the two speakers are both Siamese. One is Buddhist, the Talapoin in the first dialogue, and the villager in the second. The other speaker is Christian, representing the missionary. He appears as the hermit in the forest in the first dialogue, and the city dweller in the second. The fact that both speak Siamese, have Siamese characteristics, and follows Siamese traditions shows that Mgr. Laneau must have had a close relationship with the Talapoins, observed their way of communicating with ordinary people, and learned a great deal from them, so much so that he was able to adopt their way of preaching and professing, employing methods such as assimilations and illustrations rather than deductions.

A French manuscript, corresponding to the first Siamese Dialogue, is still extant. This is supposedly Mgr. Laneau's original French version before it was later translated into Siamese.¹⁰

⁸ In 1986, F. Edmond PEZET, Samiste, translated these two dialogues in Paris, but up till now, as far as I know, neither his translation, nor the Siamese manuscripts have been published.

⁹ This corresponds to the honorific term “เจ้าครู”, meaning “Guru Master”. The usual term used to address Siamese monk is “เจ้าทู”, meaning “My Lord Reverend”.

¹⁰ Archives M.E.P., volume 852, pp. 83 - 122, document headed “Conference between a Talapoin in the forest and a Talapoin in the town”, some researches have already been done regarding this copy by Mr. Alain FOREST (C.N.R.S.) but I have no information whatsoever about its publication

The third group of documents I would like to discuss are all culled from the archives of the M.E.P. in Paris. In contrast with the dialogues, these documents are accounts with explanations. The first book is a catechism, inspired by the historical catechism of Abbe de Fleury mentioned in the list of Mgr. Laneau, under No.22, with the story of the Jewish people, the prophets, the mystery of the Incarnation, the miracles, Jesus Christ Passion, Death and Resurrection. There is also the presentation of the creation of the world, the errors of the pagans that have to be refuted (No.23 on the list). The second book introduces different daily prayers, even some psalms composed in verses following the local tradition (No.21 on the list). The next one gives the explanation of the sacrifice of the Mass (No.13 on the list). The last one is not mentioned on the list of Mgr. Laneau, may be it's a summary bringing together various elements from different books.

The title page reads:

“Short account of the motivations of the Incarnation, Birth, Life, Miracles, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, his future Return, the Universal Trial, with a short explanation of the absolute necessity for all men to depend on their merits for Salvation.

Work of Mgr. de Metellopolis, Apostolic Vicar of Siam, composed for the instruction of the King of Siam, shortly before his death.

Obtained, as a pious and respectful present from D. Antonio Pinto, the humble student of the respectable Urbain College of the Propaganda, by the wonderful and curious library of this prestigious College.

Sent from India in the year 1691.

Comment : This document lacks some pages at the end. I could not find them because they were stolen with other books in Siam.”¹¹

¹¹ There are two remarks I would like to make concerning the first page of this document. First, most of the manuscripts kept in the archives of the M.E.P. Paris, carry the name of the Urbain College of the Propaganda. This College is situated in Rome. Antonio Pinto, a student of Mgr. Laneau's was sent there in 1688 to further his study. Pinto came back to Siam in 1695, shortly before Mgr. Laneau's death. So these manuscripts must have been taken by him and brought to Rome. The second remark concerns the last sentence that shows clearly that this manuscript is a copy of the original. It was a practice at that time to make several hand-written copies of all letters and documents to prevent them from loss. This task was done by students.

It is obvious that Mgr. Laneau had a prominent role in all the writings composed in or translated into Siamese at that time. Even if he mentioned that the books in the list were the works of his fellow missionaries in Siam, it is clear that he was the most active among them, and the three manuscripts already cited in this article belong undoubtedly to him. Of these, the Gospel is the most well known, thanks to the new edition now available in many libraries and archives. The Dialogues, Catechisms, and other documents may not be so well known, but they deserve further studies and new editions.

Besides these works, there are other manuscripts given as presents by the Séminaire des Missions Etrangères de Paris as well as by members of this Société, especially Mgr. Pallegoix to the Fonds Siamois de la Bibliothèque de Paris, where the manuscripts are indexed and include five subjects :

1. theology with books on Buddhism and Christianity
2. Jurisprudence with books on Siamese laws and even Christian canon law.
3. Sciences specially Mathematics.
4. Siamese literary, linguistics, dictionaries...
5. History of Siam and neighbouring countries.¹²

On the whole, around 30 manuscripts were written by missionaries, with several belonging to the seventeenth century. Some of the manuscripts in this collection are not properly dated and worked on only rarely by scholars...I have no intention of drawing up an inventory of all these works, but I would like to discuss some of them, especially the copies of those I brought to Thailand. As mentioned above, the documents from the M.E.P. archives, introduced in this article are copies of manuscripts dating from the seventeenth century done by the Mission's students on European paper at that time. The original manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris are written either on palm leaves or on papers kept in the still-well-preserved decorated and colorful boxes.

In the field of theology, there is a document entitled "De la Connaissance de Dieu de Saint Augustin". Well preserved, it exists in the form of manuscript inscribed on "Talipat" or "Oles"¹³, a kind of

¹² DE CROIZIER, Notice des manuscrits siamois de la Bibliothèque Nationale, éditeur Challamel, Paris, 1883, 83 p.

¹³ Talipat is the Pali equivalent of Siamese "ใบตุลา" or "leaf of palmyra palm". The latter term is Tamil in origin.

material used in India and all over Indochina for writing with a stylet. The document contains 24 leaves, 545 mm. long and 45 mm. wide, fastened together by decorative plates with gilded stripes. According to the comment, the text of this manuscript was translated into Siamese by the French missionaries in Juthia (early designation of Ayuthia), in the beginning of the 18th century.¹⁴ In fact, this exceptional document corresponds to No. 15 in Mgr. Laneau's list, "On the love and knowledge of God, taking various passages of St Augustine; one volume in Siamese language". Some missionaries mentioned this work, noting that "some Talapoins were very much pleased with this book".

Another noteworthy manuscript in this section is the catechism. There are two volumes, both composed by missionaries; the first volume at the time of Mgr. Laneau and the second later, the latter being of more complicated nature. Both look different from the ones mentioned earlier in this article. They are presented in the form of questions and answers on black cardboard. The questions are written in white and the answers in yellow (the color of gum from Cambodia popularly used in Siam). The title is written in Latin letters, this being "KHAMSON", the Siamese word still used today for "Teaching of the doctrine".

Concerning Buddhism, there are several manuscripts dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some are on palm leaves, others on European paper covered with oilcloth or local white or black cardboard-like paper. All the manuscripts have a special script called "LAINMU"¹⁵ ("MUL" in Cambodia), which is traditionally used by Khmers and Siamese to write religious works. The quotations from the Buddhist Holy Scriptures are in Pali with Khmer script (អេក្រសាស្ត្រ), written with gum from Cambodia in yellow. The explanations are in white Siamese letters. Each page is 36 mm. long and 12 mm. wide.

Finally, I would like to introduce early French works on Siamese grammar. As a matter of fact, when citing foreign studies on the Thai language, one refers to the three well-known nineteenth-century Western works:

¹⁴ Archives M.E.P., volume 863, p.466.

¹⁵ "lai mun" is more commonly known as "akson khom".

“A grammar of the Thai or Siamese Language” by Capt. J. LOW, 1828.

“Brief Grammatical Notices of the Siamese Language” by Jones TAYLOR, 1842.

“Grammatica linguae thai” by Mgr. PALLEGEOIX, 1850.

However, there are two manuscripts entitled “Grammatica linguae Siamicae” in the possession of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. As the titles and explanations are written in Latin, there is no doubt that these documents are works by the missionaries. The Siamese letters show that they belong to the period between the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. Both are written on European-style paper and correspond to No. 25 in the list of Mgr. Laneau.

All the manuscripts mentioned in this article show the exceptional works assiduously done by French missionaries in Siam during the second half of the seventeenth century, marking a period of intense evangelizing activities in the history of the Catholic Church in that country. These newly-discovered manuscripts apparently go against the general impression of most historians who often regard this particular period, more or less, as a total failure for the Catholic Mission. King Narai’s mysterious death in 1688 ushered in a new period in the Franco-Siamese relations, and the departed king’s successors no longer showed a favorable attitude towards the Church. Bleak, as the situation was, and confronted with difficulties and obstacles, Mgr. Laneau, I believe, turned to a new approach. The Siam Mission, to follow the Gospel, was to become, to a certain degree, respectful of other cultures and religions. Even in the present times, the missionaries are well advised to learn from his experience and follow his passion for composing and translating Siamese works.



List of copies of manuscripts

1. Page 109 of the new edition of the Gospel written by Mgr. Laneau.
 - a) reproductions of the manuscript p.84
 - b) literal transcription and translation in current thai p.85
(from the Archives of the Bangkok Diocese)
2. First page of the manuscript specially composed by Mgr. Laneau for the instruction of the King of Siam. p.86
(from the Archives of the M.E.P, Paris)
3. First page of the third catechism written by Mgr. Laneau.
(from the Archives of the M.E.P. Paris) p.87
4. Beginning of the manuscript concerning St. Augustine on palm leaves.p.88
(from Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, fonds Siamois, No.14)
5. First page of the catechism "KHAMSON" p.89
(from Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, fonds Siamois, No.I)
6. First page of "Story from the Buddhist Holy Scriptures" p.90
(from Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, fonds Siamois, No.16)
7. First page of the Siamese Grammar. (from Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, fonds Siamois, No.38). p.91

603

ក្រោម

๙. บัญชีราย = บัญชีผล (กำไร = กำไร + ขาดทุน = พน) ในการบันทึกบัญชีรายรับ

ก็ตามที่ได้กล่าวไว้ในหนังสือที่ตีพิมพ์

๓๖๙ ๓๖๙ ๓๖๙

๔. นิมิต = ฝัน หมายความว่า = ภัย ภัย ภัย (ภัยพากษา = ภัยภัย)



GRAMMATICAL

Lingua grecica ad usum eorum qui eam addiscere
sunt.

1. Sonat ut R.

2. Ut grecorum & idque cum aspiratione

3. Item ut & grecorum idque cum accentu acuto vocem in altissimum profundo.

4. Vt c. Sed vocem eximo pectore aperiisque vocibus idque cum multari expressando.

5. Item.

6. Item.

7. Sonat ut ng. vox ex medio gutture cum nasum admissum exhalando in fine autem ut ng. gellorum ex g. du sang in quo aduertere est & non adeo fortiter exprimendum.

8. Thalorum est quod dicendum est ut tali ut uti audierit, sed uti interpretari facili pronuntiari confirmat dimitatur. Quo vox abique ultro sive sibille efficeratur, idque extrema lingua ad palatum approximat.

9. ut tali ut idque pariter cum sibille sed cum accentu acuto ut plurimum.

10. ut & id est cum sibille.

11. Ut duplex si id vocem uel dimittendo uel producendo.

12. Item id aliquanto gravius.

13. ut i consonant.

14. ut d.

15. ut t

16. ut & grecorum id est cum aspiratione ex pectore cum aliquo in productu.

17. ut & lingua prima ad dexter superioris ordinis fornicis compresum aliquo vocem eximo pectore validissimo cum impetu exprimendo.

18. Item id labris ad lingua mortuam compresum vocemque eximo pectore hincibus fauibus eructando.

19. ut n.

20. ut b

21. ut p

22. ut p id labiis aliquantum compresum vocemque eximo pectore



