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**From Merchants to Musketeers in Ayutthaya:
The Portuguese and the Thais and their Cultures of War in the Sixteenth
Century**

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Abstract:

The paper will examine the transition of Portuguese residents of Ayutthaya from traders to soldiers in the mid-sixteenth century as a result of their mobilisation against the Burmese invaders, to the early seventeenth century. While the details of this transformation and their place in Thai armies is important, one of the key areas to be discussed is how the Portuguese community in Ayutthaya helped to encourage cultural interchange between the Thais and the growing Portuguese maritime world in their respective cultures of warfare.

Introduction

The Portuguese taking of Melaka in 1511 brought them into contact with a new world of peoples and kingdoms, on the one hand, and introduced the latter to a new array of firearm and shipping technology that was more powerful than anything they had before. Over the course of the next ninety years, Portuguese communities populated by traders, desperados, and soldiers living outside of the reach of the formal Portuguese empire in the east, the *Estado da India*, grew up in the capitals and ports of most major kingdoms in Southeast Asia and elsewhere until the arrival of the Dutch challenged the Portuguese monopoly in the region. While the Portuguese and Spanish adventurers in Burma and Cambodia get much of the attention in the case of mainland Southeast Asia, the role of the Portuguese trading community in Ayutthaya was just as old and just as important.

From the beginning of their rule at Melaka, the Portuguese and the Thais sought out to establish a mutually beneficial relationship. One of Afonso de Albuquerque's first concerns was to revive trade at Melaka after the disruptions caused by the conquest of the town by his men in 1511. Albuquerque thus sent his first ambassador to Ayutthaya, Duarte Fernandez, in the summer of 1511. Fernandez was brought there by Chinese captains, with a message from Albuquerque to the King of Ayutthaya, Ramathibodi II (r. 1491-1529), explaining that Albuquerque wanted Thai merchants to start visiting Melaka once again to sell their merchandise. Ramathibodi II sent Fernandez back with a Thai ambassador.¹ The Fernandez mission was followed by a quick succession of others. In January 1512, Albuquerque dispatched from Melaka Antonio de Miranda de Azevedo and Duarte Coelho as well

¹ Gaspar Correa, *Lendas da India* (Lisboa: Academia Real das Ciencias, 1858-1866): vol. II (pt. 2), p. 263; Afonso de Albuquerque, *Commentarios de Grande Afonso de Albuquerque* (Coimbra: Universidade Coimbra, 1922): vol. III, p. 172-174.

as a Portuguese trader, Manuel Fragoso along with the Thai ambassador on a Chinese junk. Albuquerque wanted Fragoso to gather commercially-relevant intelligence from Ayutthaya and report back to him. Miranda returned in January 1513 with Coelho, Fragoso, and a return Thai embassy. He found Melaka in difficulty and decided to remain there, sending Fragoso on with the ambassadors to Goa. In January 1514, when Albuquerque returned to Goa, he thus found waiting for him ambassadors, along with gifts they had brought, from the kings of both Pegu and Ayutthaya and from the mother of the King of Ayutthaya, all wanting peace and trade which Albuquerque was happy to agree to. Fernão Peres de Andrade and Coelho left Melaka in August 1516 for China, but the monsoons were adverse. Coelho thus left the fleet on his own for Ayutthaya, his second visit there, to trade. Andrade went to Patani where he made a trade treaty, which remained to be authorized by Goa, and Coelho returned again to Melaka.²

A permanent and extensive Luso-Thai relationship was not established until the 1518 embassy of Coelho. The third Portuguese governor of India at Goa, Lopes Soares de Albergaria (r. 1515-1518), dispatched Coelho back to Ayutthaya on 18 July 1518. This time, Coelho went as the governor's ambassador in return for the presents Ramathibodi II had earlier sent back to Melaka with Miranda. Coelho reached Ayutthaya, this being his third visit to the country, in November 1518. This time, the Portuguese not only confirmed with Ramathibodi II the treaty Miranda had earlier made, but before Coelho was sent back to Melaka in November 1519, he went further, effecting a broader military and political agreement.³ Under its expanded terms, the Portuguese were allowed to both live and trade, with religious freedom, not only at the royal city of Ayutthaya, but also in other Thai ports including Mergui, Nakhon Sritammarat, and Patani, while Thais were allowed to reside and trade at Melaka.⁴ According to Donald Lach, the 1518 agreement included terms under which the Portuguese would provide Ayutthaya with cannon and munitions for the Thais to use in a war against Chiengmai underway at the time. Lach also claims that shortly after the conclusion of the treaty, Portuguese "military advisers and instructors were attached to the Thai army" who helped make possible a "stinging defeat" of Chiengmai by Ayutthaya in 1515. He also seems to suggest that the Portuguese were responsible for Ramathibodi II's military reorganization of the kingdom afterwards, which involved dividing up the kingdom into military districts and enrolling onto military registers every man over the age of eighteen.⁵

The underlying reasons for the inclusion of the Portuguese in early modern mainland Southeast Asian armies is difficult to establish with certainty. Scholars of mainland Southeast Asia have always remarked on the importance of Portuguese mercenaries to such kings, especially during the sixteenth century. Victor Lieberman framed their condition accurately when he portrayed them as a maritime-derived resource not only important because of their firearms, but also because as mercenaries they were more dependent upon the political center that paid their wages than were

² Correa, *Lendas da India*, vol. II (pt. 1), 381; vol. II (pt. 2), p. 262; Albuquerque, *Commentarios de Grande Afonso de Albuquerque*, vol. III, p. 176; IV, pp. 103-105; Manuel de Faria y Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1666-75): vol. I, p. 183; J. Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, (London, 1857): vol. I, pp. 59-60.

³ Florentino Rodao, "The Castillians Discover Siam: Changing Visions and Self-discovery," *Journal of the Siam Society* 95 (2007): 8; Edmund Roberts put the date of the first intercourse between the Siamese and the Portuguese at 1521, Edmund Roberts, *Embassy to the Eastern courts of Cochinchina, Siam, and Muscat* (New York: Harper, 1837): p. 298.

⁴ Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994): vol., I, 521.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol., I, p. 521, 530.

regional levies whose loyalties were uncertain.⁶ Certainly, those kingdoms with maritime ports had better access to the revenues that the purveyors of such weaponry demanded and privileged access worked to encourage political consolidation in favour of coastal polities over those of the interior in the first half century at least after their introduction.⁷ Nevertheless, firearms of this time were cumbersome and not as accurate or as powerful as later weaponry and how they fared compared to widely-distributed Chinese (or even Indian) weapons of the time is still open to debate, although European weapons steadily improved over the course of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century. Scholars sometimes add to the Portuguese possession of firearms and ability in handling them a greater willingness to inflict bloody damage on opposing troops than perhaps Southeast Asians would have inflicted.⁸ Other scholars have suggested that it was not just weapons or their availability as mercenaries per se that encouraged employment of Portuguese, but instead their experience and knowledge in the defensive technologies of the gunpowder age that could prove very useful in countering the impact of new firearms. As one scholar has suggested Ayutthaya was interested in acquiring Portuguese as mercenaries at the beginning of their relationship in the 1510s and that this desire increased after the Burmese began using Portuguese mercenaries and firearms—“Ayutthaya required skilled technicians, new military strategies and fortifications able to withstand the new artillery.”⁹

Moreover, we know from sources both Portuguese and indigenous that there were plenty of foreigners available, both Southeast Asians and Europeans, and, by the early seventeenth century, Japanese Catholic refugees as well. There is a problem here of potential bias in the sources. The only materials that do anything more than incidentally mention Portuguese involved in mainland armies of the time are Portuguese letters, memoirs, and chronicles and on occasion diplomatic correspondence from indigenous rulers who were necessarily interested in stroking the ego of their audience to obtain favor. Indigenous chronicles do refer to Portuguese on occasion but do not reveal the reasons why they were sought out and just as often as not, pretend that the Portuguese were something else, giving Portuguese mercenaries in Arakan, for example, Burmese names and an indigenous genealogy. The kings of Ayutthaya may have favored other foreigners just as much as the Portuguese at this time, but these others did not leave the voluminous accounts the Portuguese left us. We have to rely upon the glimpses of Muslim accounts of the seventeenth century which indicate that groups other than the Portuguese were equally favored, although even the Portuguese accounts cannot disguise to the careful reader the importance of other foreign groups.¹⁰

Some of the most detailed information on Portuguese in the service of the court of Ayutthaya comes not surprisingly from fellow Portuguese who had been there. Unfortunately, while we have their accounts, they are opaque from awkward renderings of indigenous names and exaggeration by later editors, including older versions of themselves. The account of Mendez Pinto, for example, provides one of

⁶ Victor B. Lieberman, “Europeans, Trade, and the Unification of Burma, c. 1540-1620,” *Oriens Extremus* 27 (1980): p. 207.

⁷ Idem., *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c 800-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): I, p. 48, 291.

⁸ Ibid., I, p. 48.

⁹ Rodao, “The Castillians Discover Siam,” p. 8.

¹⁰ Mendez Pinto, *Peregrinação de Fernam Mendez Pinto; em que da conta de muytas e muyto estranhas cousas que io & ouuio* (Lisboa: Pedro Grasbeeck, 1614): p. 239.

the greatest insider accounts of Portuguese and other activities in mainland Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the 1540s, but his accuracy varies from his briefer 1550s account to the better circulated and expanded version of his travels published for the first time in 1614. While we need not believe that Pinto did everything he says, but much of it is probably accurate information not available anywhere else.¹¹ Relying upon the information in them, corroborating them with other sources as much as possible helps to retain a crucial source for our understanding the Portuguese in Ayutthaya (and Burma) in the mid-sixteenth century.

Pinto tells us that during his time in Ayutthaya,¹² King Chairacha (r. 1534-1546) maintained as his personal guards a force of 120 Portuguese. In the middle of Chairacha's reign, King Tabinshwehti (r. 1531-1550) of Burma had begun campaigning into Thai territory and the royal commander of forces on the frontier, the Phraya Kamphaengphet,¹³ was killed. Chairacha thus gave orders that all men who could bear arms, and this included all foreigners in the capital, would have to appear in twelve days time when the royal army would leave to subdue the rebels. Interestingly, the king chose the Portuguese to serve as his personal guards, reportedly alone amongst all other foreign nations in the capital, and they were promised they would be rewarded for their service. Out of a total of 130 Portuguese men then in Ayutthaya, presumably all involved in trade, 120 elected to remain in the kingdom and serve the king as requested in the campaign. Reportedly, when the king was on his deathbed, he granted these 120 Portuguese guards, as a result of their dedicated service, a certain portion of royal revenues, exclusion from customs duties for three years, and the freedom for Portuguese priests to preach throughout the kingdom.¹⁴

One of the best detailed examples of Portuguese in Thai service in the first half of the sixteenth century is the case of Domingo de Seixas who lived in Ayutthaya from the early 1520s (and perhaps earlier) until 1540 and although Pinto appears to be the original source for the much (but not all) of the information about him found in later Portuguese chronicles, his existence can be corroborated by official Portuguese documents of the time. Seixas was sent to Chittagong to secure supplies for the Portuguese fighting against Aceh, but meeting Portuguese freebooters en route he followed them to Tenasserim to seek his provisions there. After loading his ship, the pirates took it and stranded him there with seventeen other Portuguese. The Thais then forced him into servitude. In 1540, the Portuguese sent an emissary, Francisco de Castro, to Ayutthaya to secure his release, for they incorrectly believed that he was being held captive there. Nevertheless, he took the opportunity to leave Ayutthaya anyway at this time with sixteen of his men, and was repaid richly for his services.¹⁵

The "services" Seixas rendered reveal a good deal that helps to expand upon our picture of Portuguese "mercenary" activities in the Thai court at this time. We are told that Seixas was appointed by the Thai king as the commander of a large royal army serving in the interior and was approved of greatly by the Thai court.¹⁶ In this way, Seixas appears to be Ayutthaya's version of contemporary Burma's Diogo

¹¹ For a discussion of Pinto and his account, see Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. I, 531; III, pp. 324-325; George D. Winius, "Early Portuguese travel and influence at the corner of Asia," in *Studies on Portuguese Asia, 1495-1689* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001): p. 220.

¹² Pinto himself says he was in Ayutthaya from 1540 until 1545. Lach thinks he was there in 1548-9. See Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. I, p. 531.

¹³ Pinto here terms the title "oya." Here, I follow Lach's understanding of this as a rendering of p'aya. See Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. I, p. 529.

¹⁴ Pinto, *Peregrinaçam*, p. 231, 234.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235; Manuel de Faria y Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa* (Lisbon: 1666-1675): vol. I, p. 225.

¹⁶ Pinto, *Peregrinaçam*, p. 235.

Soares de Mello, also known as “the Galego” [“the Galician”]. Soares is mainly known through Pinto’s account. Soares was in Burma during the campaigns and fall of Tabinshwehti, the ambitious king of the First Toungoo Dynasty who brought most of western and central mainland Southeast Asia under at least temporary Burmese domination. This rapid expansion, occurring in only a few decades of the middle of the sixteenth century is believed to be at least partly due to the dynasty’s acquisition of the port of Pegu and with it access to maritime revenues that afforded firearms and foreign mercenaries, such as the Portuguese. Soares appears to have been a talented commander and accomplished in firearm strategy. Unfortunately, he was equally an arrogant and callous individual as he robustly and fatally demonstrated in the circumstances leading to his death at the hands of a Burmese mob after his employer’s murder on the pretext of his seizure of a Peguan maiden on her wedding day four years earlier. Before his body was rendered into pulp, however, Soares had risen to an astounding level of wealth and power. In the space of ten years, from 1538 when he first sailed to Asia to 1548 when he advised Tabinshwehti at the siege of Martaban, he rose to become the king’s main “field commander,” had the title of his [the king’s] brother, was made governor of kingdom of Pegu. His salary may be used as a gauge of his importance in Pegu relative to that of Seixas in Ayutthaya. Although by any standard Seixas was paid well by the Thais, with an annual salary of 18,000 *cruzados*, this level of remuneration pales in comparison to the 200,000 *cruzados* Soares commanded annually in Pegu.¹⁷

Seixas’ and Soares’ relationships with their respective employers differed in areas of responsibility. Soares is said to have always held sway with Tabinshwehti in military matters. The importance of Soares’ advice is particularly stressed in the manner in which artillery were to be directed in battering down the defenses of Martaban in 1540-1541 and later, in 1548, before the walls of Ayutthaya, Soares had basically the same role, suggesting that it was Soares’ knowledge of firearms and related tactics that made him so important to the Burmese ruler. By contrast, there is no suggestion that Seixas was ever as important to the Thai court. In Chairacha’s campaign against Chiangmai, Seixas was one of three foreign field commanders, the other two being Turks. Afterwards, Chairacha appointed Seixas as commander of reportedly 35,000 royal troops, serving at a frontier outpost in the interior of the kingdom and mainly involved in subduing hill tribes.¹⁸ We may extrapolate that Seixas like other Portuguese was trusted in part because he had loyalties directly to the center—in subduing trouble on the frontier, amongst tributaries in the highlands, relying upon such a commander would have made political sense. Interestingly, the application of firearms in these campaigns or even Seixas’ knowledge of or ability to use them is never mentioned. The contrast is strengthened when we direct attention to the example of the use by Tabinshwehti of João de Cayeyro, commander of 700 Portuguese, at the siege of Martaban in 1540-1541, apparently employed by Tabinshwehti for their command of firearms alone. Although the ruler of Martaban asked the Portuguese to switch sides, on the basis of his attempts to do them favours in the past, they refused, highlighting the kind of strong loyalties rulers could buy with cash when they were in a position of strength. The Portuguese aiding the ruler of Martaban, Paulo de Seixas, for example, abandoned the port before its collapse.¹⁹

We have more information as to the employment of the Portuguese in Thai service during the Burmese siege Ayutthaya in 1548. At that time, there were only

¹⁷ Ibid., 235, 239, 247-48.

¹⁸ Ibid., 235, 239, 243.

¹⁹ Pinto, *Peregrinaçam*, 180-182, 185.

about fifty Portuguese men present in the royal capital, their head being a man named Diogo Perreyra.²⁰ As mentioned, when the Burmese besieged Martaban in 1540-1541, there were attempts to get the Portuguese mercenaries on the Burmese side to switch loyalties to Martaban. The Burmese themselves would try this at Ayutthaya in 1548, but the Portuguese there turned the bribe down. Instead, the Portuguese played a substantial role in the defense. Perreyra was allowed to command the Portuguese during the siege and they were distributed to the most vulnerable areas of the capital defenses.²¹ This proved a successful strategy and the Burmese lifted the siege very soon after they had commenced it.²² The Portuguese would be involved in defense of Ayutthaya during several more Burmese invasions including King Bayinnaung's (r. 1551-1581) unsuccessful siege of Ayutthaya in 1563, in which three ships manned by Portuguese sat in the river aiding the defense with its guns. Bayinnaung would not succeed in taking Ayutthaya until 1569.²³

Our story of the Portuguese role in Thai armies ends in 1569, but there is a good chance it would have wound up with a more dramatic ending if it had not been for the Burmese. When they were content with trading alone, the Portuguese had few aspirations to local territorial control. However, the presence of some amongst the royal bodyguards, such as Philip de Brito in Arakan, provided them with a degree of familiarity and intimacy that also worked to the detriment of the authority and awe with which they held indigenous courts. In De Brito's case, he rebelled at Syriam in the early seventeenth century, established an independent kingdom loosely allied with Goa and launched a reign of terror on interior Burmese polities and coastal shipping alike. In 1613, King Anaukpetlun (r. 1606-1628) of Ava besieged de Brito, hung him above the town, and carried his men back up to northern Burma where their children would form the hereditary artillerymen of the Burmese court for almost three centuries.²⁴ In other words, their transition from traders to musketeers was made more or less a permanent one. Again, the Burmese conquest of Ayutthaya in 1569 has possibly denied us the example of an outcome similar to that of the Portuguese rebels in Burma. Instead, when such events did occur in Ayutthaya they were undertaken not by Portuguese but instead by samurai warriors from Japan who rebelled against the Thai court and established control over at least one important town.

Having detailed how the Portuguese engaged with Ayutthaya and came to be employed in war by it, the question of how much they influenced the Thais remains. An important way that the Portuguese encounter with mainland Southeast Asia differed in the first half of the sixteenth century from in the last half of that century was that Catholic priests seem to have had little or no presence, the first record of their arrival being two Dominican priests, Jeronimo da Cruz and Sebastião da Canto, who arrived in 1567 from Melaka. The former was killed by Muslim rivals to the Portuguese soon after their arrival and although a total of three Dominican priests

²⁰ Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission sent by the Governor-general of India* (London: Smith, Elder, 1858): 210.

²¹ Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, vol. I, pp. 59-60.

²² Richard D. Cushman, (trans.). *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, edited by David K. Wyatt (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000): p. 26.

²³ Henry Shorto, (tr.), unpublished typescript translation of pp. 34-44, 61-264 of Phra Candakanto (ed.) *Nidana Ramadhipati-katha* (or as on binding Rajawamsa Dhammaceti Mahapitakadhara), (Pak Lat, Siam, 1912): p. 105.

²⁴ The present author has covered these developments in depth in Michael W. Charney, "Arakan, Min Yazagyi, and the Portuguese: the relationship between the growth of Arakanese imperial power and Portuguese mercenaries on the fringe of mainland Southeast Asia 1517-1617," (Masters thesis, Ohio University. 1993).

were present in Ayutthaya in 1569, they were all killed when the Burmese took the city. Such priests were thus unlikely cultural intermediaries until their presence grew and became more permanent in the seventeenth century.²⁵

Meaningful cultural interchange, then, depended upon others, in part the Portuguese trading men operating on the fringes of the Estado da India in places such as Ayutthaya in the first half of the sixteenth century. Their unique position to act as cultural brokers between the Portuguese and indigenous worlds has led George D. Winius to refer to them as “interface” peoples.²⁶ We cannot forget, however, that Portuguese and Thai relations were multilateral, not simply bilateral. While overtly the two sides may have specified peculiar interchange, there were many other intermediaries who contributed to exchange and impressions between the two. Although the Thai king was surprised by the arrival of the first Portuguese emissary, Fernandez in 1511, the king had already heard about the Portuguese and their fleet outside of Melaka before the assault began.²⁷ Although from who they received this information is unclear, we must assume that some details about the Portuguese threat to Melaka, their unusual ships, their weapons, and so on, must have been conveyed. Certainly, most rulers in the region must have heard about the surprising conquest of the important port.

One of the most interesting questions concerning the Portuguese community in Ayutthaya was how it helped to encourage cultural interchange between the Thais and the growing Portuguese maritime world in their respective cultures of warfare and in other ways. Scholars have already recognized how important European mercenaries were as cultural intermediaries between Europe and Southeast Asia, in particular because their importance to early modern Southeast Asian armies gave the mercenaries significant prestige and thus access to court elites.²⁸

Less attention has been paid to less lofty cultural interchange—the nitty gritty of muskets, cannon, and the skill to handle both, as well as other aspects of martial culture. The Portuguese and the Thais represented themselves through (and thus put their new relationship into the context of) martial culture from the beginning of their contacts. As part of the gifts sent back to Melaka on Fernandez’ return to Melaka later in 1511, the king included not only a ruby ring and a crown, but also a gold sword. Although the Thai ruler may have viewed these as a gift of royal regalia, for the king believed Albuquerque had offered him suzerainty over Melaka, the Portuguese ruling on his behalf, the Portuguese appear not to have viewed the gifts in this way. For the Thai embassy, their arrival for the first time in Melaka after the conquest revealed a more significant military installation than in the past. Albuquerque had firm control of the port and had raised up the new European-style stone fortress, complete with towers and Portuguese artillery.²⁹

The Miranda embassy in 1512 was also rich in cultural expressions. In his letter to the Thai king, Albuquerque explained that he was a soldier and thus provided gifts that would come from a soldier, the weapons he used against his enemies and in defense of his friends. Gifted by the letter were the weapons that Miranda and his six Portuguese companions carried for the Thai king. These included first of all the trophies Albuquerque had acquired from the sultan of Melaka’s ceremonial breast-pieces, a spear, a leather buckler, and a helmet with a chin guard. Albuquerque’s main

²⁵ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, I, pp. 536-537.

²⁶ Winius, “Early Portuguese travel and influence at the corner of Asia,” p. 221.

²⁷ Albuquerque, *Commentarios de Grande Afonso de Albuquerque*, vol. III, p. 173.

²⁸ Rodao, “The Castillians Discover Siam,” p. 9.

²⁹ Albuquerque, *Commentarios de Grande Afonso de Albuquerque*, vol. III, p. 174.

intent, however, was revealed in his letter which explained to the King of Ayutthaya how, in the case of Melaka, when someone took arms against him and acted in an unfriendly way, the Portuguese were able to handily defeat them.³⁰ Miranda was greeted enthusiastically at the court and the king was happy with the gifts, having one of his men try on the armour to see how it fit. The Thai king responded with his own set of gifts, including amongst other things, twenty long cane spears, as well as mural paintings of festivals, but also of Thai warfare.³¹ Over the years of successful Portuguese warfare with indigenous fleets and armies many times their size in later decades, the prominent place of Portuguese in regional warfare must have strengthened the attractiveness of a relationship with them in the eyes of the Thais, themselves facing during this period numerous military challenges from an increasingly aggressive Burma.

As I have shown above, the Portuguese and the Thais did not limit themselves to mere representations of their respective warfare culture. They had very real material exchanges and relationships integrating Portuguese and Western gunpowder technology into the mainland Southeast Asian warfare context, balancing out the Portuguese impact among Ayutthaya's lowland neighbours, Burma in particular. Some scholars view the Portuguese as beginning a kind of revolution in Ayutthaya. As Winius explains,

One can see that after the Portuguese arrival, king and court and country became irreversibly and permanently changed, woven, as it were into the economic, military, political, and technological pattern of the West. The transformations, to be sure, did not take place all at once, but from the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the way things were done in native kingdoms came more and more to resemble European norms, purely by responding to them.³²

Nevertheless, there is reason to suspect that our expectations of cultural influence as a result of Thai and Portuguese interaction in the field of warfare are exaggerated and derived from too little source material. This is partly because of the nature of mainland politics and warfare themselves. Indigenous kings were hesitant to see their mercenaries and gunpowder technologies aid rivals to the throne and thus were happy to see as little indigenous adoption of such technologies as possible. Certainly this was the case in Burma. Another underlying factor is perhaps that Portuguese influence in sixteenth century Ayutthaya was not to be sustained because of accidents of history and we shall never know what might have emerged from their relationship. While we do know that the Portuguese were drawn upon for the Thai army in the 1530s and again in the late 1540s, the Burmese took Ayutthaya in 1569 and dragged off not only wealth and captured firearms, they also took the Portuguese (and likely their associates) they found there and carried them back to Burma where they were freed and praised for their loyalty to their former employer.³³

Even so, one would expect that their influence would have lingered anyway, if it had been substantial among the local population. The present author entertains serious doubts about it. As Jacob van de Coutere confirmed on the basis of his

³⁰ Ibid., vol. III, p. 178.

³¹ Correa, *Lendas da India*, book II, tomo. II, 263-264.

³² Winius, "Early Portuguese travel and influence at the corner of Asia," 222.

³³ Gaspero Balbi, "Voyage to Pegu, and Observations There, Circa 1583," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1.2 (Autumn 2003): 33.

experience in Ayutthaya in 1595, the Thais could only make what appeared to be popguns, far inferior in size and caliber to Western firearms.³⁴ This suggests either that the Portuguese had not fully shared their knowledge of casting cannon or making muskets or that this knowledge was circulated among too limited a circle to have survived the Burmese conquest. In any event, there seems to be little to corroborate the very substantial “military, political, and technological” transformation of the kingdom suggested by Winius to have been introduced by the Portuguese.³⁵

Highlighting the lack of evidence for a military revolution in Ayutthaya does not mean negating the cultural importance of the Portuguese and their relationship with the Thais in the first half of the sixteenth century. Instead, we can see them as cultural intermediaries in the same way that Florentino Rodao had considered them, shaping a particular view of Thai society because of the particular nature of their interaction with it. Rodao found that despite early shared impressions of Ayutthaya inherited from earlier European travelers, beginning with Marco Polo, Castellians and Portuguese developed very different impressions of Ayutthaya as a result of diverging interests and relationships in the sixteenth century. Albuquerque fostered a favorable relationship with Ayutthaya as a local non-Muslim power that had been hostile to the previous rulers of Melaka, which he had conquered in 1511. Ayutthaya was thus a good prospective ally as well as a source of supplies and Albuquerque thus sent a series of embassies to the regional power.³⁶ As a result, the first relationship between the Portuguese and the Thais was in trade, while Castellians, with few commercial connections here, emerged later on the scene (especially from the time of the 1580 union of Portugal and Spain) and saw Ayutthaya as a potential conquest.³⁷ For our purposes in this paper, there is certainly more than enough evidence, in the form of Portuguese chronicles and reports, to confirm that the Portuguese who served in Thai armies were significant informants on Thai society. Seixas, for example, provided detailed if confused accounts of everything from the state to Buddhist thought. Expectedly, there is reference to military information, such as the size and organization of the Thai army, but there is much more in the details of the kingdom, its rulers, its geography, and even its religion.³⁸

Conclusion

Over the course of the 1510s to the 1540s, the Portuguese engaged with Ayutthaya very much in the same way as they did in other areas of the maritime world of Southeast Asia—they established trading communities closely wedded to the indigenous landscape but also linked to the world of the Estado da India. At the same time, the relationship between that state and the court of Ayutthaya was clearly defined by military links and exchanges. These two streams of interaction, trade and war culture, were brought together in the form of the Portuguese mercenary. Although this status or occupation was by accident or force, such men rose to prominent levels of engagement with indigenous states such as Ayutthaya. As a result, they were valued informants on indigenous society for the Portuguese and useful advisers and practitioners of warfare to the Thais. Nevertheless, the nature of indigenous statecraft likely minimized their longterm impact on indigenous martial culture. Instead, their

³⁴ Ibid., 224.

³⁵ Ibid., 222.

³⁶ Rodao, “The Castellians Discover Siam,” 7-8.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, 1.61.

main import was to exchange information between each other. From the Portuguese evidence, we note their importance in crafting a Western understanding of Thailand. Regarding the reverse flow, their impact on Thailand during this period is more difficult to discern, but almost certainly exaggerated by some scholars. Had it not been for the Burmese sacking of Ayutthaya, perhaps more evidence would be available, but certainly by the end of the sixteenth century, the residual influence on Thai warfare would seem to have been minimal.

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