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THE FALL OF AYUTTHAYA
A Reassessment

Helen James∗

Conventional views of the 1760–1767 Burmese attacks on Ayutthaya contend that the Burmese were taking advantage of an opportunity to attack a politically and economically weak kingdom. This article adduces evidence from the Burmese chronicles, from accounts by contemporary foreign observers, and from economic history to argue that Burma’s campaigns against Ayutthaya were part of an epic struggle between the two polities that began in the 1500s and continued until the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–1826. Control of trade was one of the central factors motivating this centuries-long conflict. It was the very strength and wealth of the Siamese kingdom, not its alleged weakness, that motivated the Burmese invaders, who hoped to strike a blow that would knock Ayutthaya out of contention as the trading hub of mainland Southeast Asia.

Introduction
The 1767 destruction of the great golden city of Ayutthaya by the Burmese has traditionally been presented as a natural conclusion to years of economic and political decline during which Ayutthaya had weakened itself through a deliberate policy of economic isolationism.1 At the time of the two Burmese invasions of the 1760s, Siam was supposedly even weaker than usual, as after the death of King Borommakot in 1758 the ruling house was torn by rivalry among would-be successors. The man who won the upper hand, Prince Ekathat, is conventionally thought to have been a poor ruler

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who led an ineffective and ill-prepared defense against the invasions. Thus, when the Burmese King Alaungpaya invaded in 1760, Ayutthaya is thought to have survived purely by chance. When King Hsinbyushin invaded again in 1765-1767, Ayutthaya's fall was almost inevitable.

Until recently, most historians explained the Burmese campaigns purely in terms of political motives of the most personal and expansionist kind. For example, as we will see below, in the 1760 campaign Alaungpaya was supposedly motivated by a desire to continue in Siam the successful military campaigns recently completed against Pegu, or, alternatively, to punish Ayutthaya for not maintaining the tribute that had been paid to the Burmese crown in earlier years, or to take revenge for Siamese interference with Burmese shipping around the Tenasserim region. As for the 1765-1767 campaign of Alaungpaya's successor, Hsinbyushin, it is conventionally treated as a mere continuation of the aggressive pattern of warfare that Alaungpaya had established.

Recent scholarship has provided a basis for new approaches to these issues. For example, scholars have recently begun to acknowledge that Ayutthaya fought well against the Burmese. Most of the relevant contemporary Thai administrative records were destroyed in the fires that consumed Ayutthaya in 1767, and the chronicles written in the successor Siamese kingdoms are dismissive of the defenders' efforts. However, the Burmese records show that, despite the considerable dissension that indeed existed in the Siamese leadership, the Siamese conducted a tenacious defense. As Sunait has recently noted, these records show that up to the very end the Siamese "ruler had made good preparation and fought vigorously, not doing nonsense nor being feeble-minded as understood."

It also appears that Ayutthaya was not as weak economically as had once been thought. For example, David Wyatt and Dhiravat na Pombeja have recently shown that in the early to middle 1700s Ayutthaya was not isolationist but was instead an economically strong polity whose leaders demonstrated a resilient self-confidence and independence in furthering international trade, dealing effectively with the foreign merchants and missionaries who continued to be attracted to Ayutthaya as a great cosmopolitan

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entrepot. The present article shows that this very economic vigor was one of the reasons for the Burmese invasions of the 1760s. These attacks resumed a long-standing pattern of warfare in which the Burmese sought control of the trade routes on which the Siamese polity based its strength. The presentation argues that the Burmese destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767 was meant to undermine Siam’s economic base by destroying its key ports, its marketplace, and its external sources of manpower, while hoping to redirect its trade to Burmese ports.

In sum, it was Ayutthaya’s very strength and wealth, not its alleged weakness, that prompted Konbaung Burma to attempt to knock it out of contention as the trading hub of mainland Southeast Asia. It was also this strength and wealth that enabled the Siamese polity, reduced to ashes in 1767, to rise again, centered this time on the modern capital of Bangkok.

**Motives for the Burmese Invasions**

*The Overt Reasons*

According to the Burmese Annals, the immediate provocation for Alaungpaya’s 1760 campaign against Ayutthaya was his anger over Siamese military activities around Tavoy that included the seizure of three ships bound for Rangoon, one of which had been expressly sent to Tavoy by Alaungpaya himself. The Burmese Annals say that Alaungpaya announced he would avenge this insult to his dignity by personally marching into Siam and capturing the capital.

The description of events left to us by Captain Michael Symes, British envoy to Burma in 1795, suggests that Alaungpaya’s 1760 campaign against Ayutthaya may also have been inspired by a desire to exact retribution for Siamese support of the Mons during their war of independence in the years 1740–1757.  

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3 David K. Wyatt, “King Borommakot, His Court, and Their World,” in *In the King’s Trail: An 18th Century Dutch Journey to the Buddha’s Footprint*, Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra, eds. (Bangkok: Sirivattana Interprint, 1997), 53.

4 Victor B. Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest 1580–1760* ([Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984], 267). Note also the timing of the expedition so soon after the demise of Siav’s King Borommakot (13 April 1758), which was followed by the usual disputed succession (see D. K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984], 132). Alaungpaya may have expected to be able to benefit from any possibility of disunity in the Ayutthaya leadership.

5 Michael Symes, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava Sent by the Governor-General of India in the Year, 1795* (London: Ballmer and Co., 1800).
incursions into the Delta region in 1757 in particular are said to have convinced Alaungpaya that a punitive expedition against Ayutthaya was warranted. Therefore, the reasoning goes, after Alaungpaya had dispatched his enemies at Negrais and Syriam, where he perceived the English and French were aiding the Mons, he finished the job by turning his attention to Siam.

Victor Lieberman has cast doubt on both these motives. For example, he doubts that Alaungpaya’s complaints about the Siamese seizure of Burmese ships was anything more than a convenient justification for the Burmese aggression, which he believes had long been part of Alaungpaya’s intentions toward Siam. He notes that Siam had refrained from taking advantage of Burma’s internal troubles during the 1740s and that Siam’s participation in the Mon-Burmese struggles as they affected the Tenasserim region was “limited and inadvertent.”

The Real Reason—Economic Gain

Lieberman suggests that the real motive for the Burmese attacks on Ayutthaya, both in the 1700s and two centuries earlier, may have had to do with economics: “As in the sixteenth century, there may have been an element of commercial rivalry between the Delta ports and Mergui [then under Siamese control], which remained an entrepot of some importance.” Burmese ambitions went beyond the capture of a single port or even a single polity, as Alaungpaya’s expedition against Ayutthaya was just “one element in a far-reaching program to conquer virtually the entire trans-Salween T’ai area.”

The present article expands on this notion of economic motives for the Burmese invasions of the 1760s. It argues that Alaungpaya was motivated not by pointless naked expansionism nor by petty revenge, nor even by a rivalry between two ports on the Bay of Bengal. Rather, by invading Siam the Burmese rulers sought to rechannel to Burma all the trade that had been flowing through Ayutthaya itself.

Both in the 1500s and in the 1700s the Burmese invaders appear

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Symes’s account is consistent with Captain Baker’s account of his own audience with Alaungpaya in 1755 and with Baker’s summary of the Burmese-Mon war. See A. Dalrymple, Oriental Repertory (London: William Ballantine, 1808), 133–165.

5 Lieberman, Burmese Administrative Cycles, 267.

6 Lieberman, Burmese Administrative Cycles, 267.

7 Lieberman, Burmese Administrative Cycles, 267.
to have had three economically-oriented aims. The first and most
evident aim was the desire to capture the trade routes across the
Malay peninsula that passed through Mergui, Martaban, and Tavoy.
Ayutthaya’s seizure of these areas in the late 1400s had contributed
significantly to the kingdom’s rise as a major commercial entrepot
by giving it an advantageous position from which to participate in
the growing Indian Ocean trade that had resulted from the founding
of Malacca. When Malacca fell to the Portuguese in 1511, these
three trans-peninsular ports became even more important, as
Muslim traders viewed them as an attractive alternative to dealing
with the Portuguese. Commanding the portage routes across the
narrow neck of the Peninsula, Mergui in particular had played a
major role in west-east trade since at least the third century, and at
the time it had an excellent harbor. Arab, Persian, and Indian
merchants passed through Mergui as they brought Indian cotton
cloths, minerals, opium, and dyestuffs to Ayutthaya in exchange for
aromatic woods and gums, spices, tin, ivory, Chinese porcelain, and
Thai Sawankhalok ware. Meanwhile, an important trade in tin
flowed out of Tavoy.

In the middle of the 1500s, the Burmese kings countered the
Siamese position in this area by moving their capital to Pegu in the
Irrawaddy delta. They sought thereby to enhance Burma’s
participation in international trade while making the city a
launching pad for their forays into Siam. From this base at Pegu
King Tabinshwehti attacked Ayutthaya in 1548 and his successor
King Bayinnaung subdued the polity in 1569. Lieberman sees a
predominantly commercial motivation for these attacks, saying that
Tabinshwehti wanted to “win control of the transpensular traffic
with the Gulf of Siam” and that Bayinnaung sought to draw the
profit of the Asian spice trade into Pegu and to impose tribute
quotas on luxury exports that originated from the interior T’ai states
and were being sold to international merchants through Pegu.

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9 Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History, 86.
10 J. Mills, “The Swinging Pendulum: From Centrality to Marginality—A
Study of Southern Tenasserim in the History of Southeast Asia,” Journal of
11 See A. Forbes, “Tenasserim: The Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya’s Link with
the Indian Ocean,” Indian Ocean Newsletter 3(1):2 (1982), for a discussion of
the trade passing to Ayutthaya through this region.
13 Philippe Preschez, “Les Relations entre la France et la Birmanie au XVIIIe
14 Lieberman, Burmese Administrative Cycles, 30-32.
Under Bayinnaung’s rule, the port of Pegu came to dominate the maritime trade of mainland Southeast Asia. Lieberman notes that whereas “Ayudhya had once rivaled Pegu as a regional power... the latter’s wealth and authority were now unequalled.” Bayinnaung is also said to have built a fleet of seven ships for oceangoing commercial voyages on behalf of the crown. Lieberman has estimated that by the late 1500s over eighteen percent of India’s eastern trade was passing through lower Burma and Mergui. Although Pegu was the dominant port at this time, Mergui remained important enough that Bayinnaung made special arrangements there for the supervision of shipping and for the accommodation of envoys from India.

As the Burmese kingdom weakened toward the end of the century, the Siamese and the port of Mergui regained their economic position. The Siamese King Naresuan’s recapture of Mergui and Tavoy in 1593 meant that profits from the Indian Ocean trade reverted once again to Ayutthaya. Pegu itself was destroyed in 1599, after which European traveler Peter Floris wrote that “Siam is comme upp agayne, which, because of the domination of Pegu, was somewhat decayed.” Tavoy was recaptured by the Burmese in 1614, yet throughout the 1600s Ayutthaya grew increasingly wealthy on the revenues of an international trade network in which Mergui ranked among the first eight cities of the kingdom.
prominent role continued into the early 1700s, at which time it ranked second only to the restored port of Pegu (again controlled by the Burmese) in attracting from the Indian port of Madras a trade in goods such as elephants and tin.\(^{22}\)

Burma’s second economic aim would have been to control the trade routes through what is now northern Thailand into what is now southwest China. During the reign of King Bayinnaung (1551–1581), Chiang Mai had been brought into the Burmese sphere of influence, and the Burmese had generally maintained control ever since. The “Southerners,” as the people of Ayutthaya are called in the Chiang Mai Chronicle, are said to have brought an army up to attack Chiang Mai in 1660/61 but to have failed in their assault, although they did manage to take Chiang Saen.\(^{23}\) The Burmese also appear to have lost control of the Chiang Mai area briefly following their failed 1760 attack on Ayutthaya. However, these were but brief interruptions to a period of Burmese control that continued from the 1500s until the late 1700s.\(^{24}\) Through their control of Chiang Mai the Burmese thwarted any designs Ayutthaya may have had for extending its influence into the Sipsong Panna, in what is now southwest China, which was the source of such high-value goods as rubies, forest products, and musk. Ever since the Burmese had established control of this northern route in the 1500s, Ayutthaya’s economic well-being had more than ever depended on the southern trade routes across the Peninsula.

The third economic attraction would have been the city of Ayutthaya itself. Writing of the campaigns of Tabinshwehti (1548) and Bayinnaung (1564–1569), Sunait Chutintaranond says that

The rise of Ayudhya as an important international trade center of the Thai world cannot be understated. Burmese kings knew that Ayudhya was one of the most wealthy ports, enriched with luxury and agriculture goods and particularly manpower, the most precious source available. Attacking

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\(^{24}\) In the late 1700s, the lord of Chiang Mai, Chao Kawila, made himself a vassal to Ayutthaya’s successor kingdoms in Thonburi and Bangkok.
Ayudhya thus was a worthwhile investment in itself.\textsuperscript{25}

Sunait’s statement would have been as true for the 1760s as it was for the mid-1500s. As we will see, French and Dutch records from the mid-1700s indicate that at the time Ayutthaya was a very resilient kingdom confidently engaged in international trade, negotiating commercial agreements with the Dutch East India Company (the VOC), and cultivating trade with China.

As in the campaigns two hundred years earlier, Alaungpaya probably intended to take over Ayutthaya’s trade and divert its revenues and tribute to Burma. Possession of Mergui and Chiang Mai would not be enough to achieve this goal, because the transpeninsular and northern Thai trade routes were not the only ones of use to Ayutthaya. Another important route traveled from Ayutthaya through Laos into southwest China (a route over which Alaungpaya’s successor Hsinbyushin would attempt to establish control),\textsuperscript{26} yet another passed southeast through Chanthaburi (this route was probably out of Burma’s reach),\textsuperscript{27} and a third would have


\textsuperscript{26} Both Engelbert Kaempfer (A Description of the Kingdom of Siam 1690 [Bangkok: White Orchid, 1987. Orig. pub. 1777]), 40, and Gervais, Natural and Political History, 237, describe the trade in gold, precious stones, rubies, pearls, and forest products between Siam and Laos, thus confirming observations previously made by the Chevalier de Chaumont during his embassy of 1685. The Chevalier records that the Siamese conducted commerce in the Lao kingdoms both by land and river; that cloths from Surat and Coromandel were brought there; that rubies, musk, gum, elephants’ teeth, rhinoceros horn, and deer and buffalo hides were exported from Laos at a very good price; and that there was great profit made from this commerce without risk. See Chevalier de Chaumont, Relation de l’Ambassade de M. le Chevalier de Chaumont à la Cour du Roi de Siam (Bangkok: Chalermmit, 1985. Orig. pub. 1685), 152. The Burmese Annals record the many campaigns attempted by various Burmese kings—Tabinshwehti, Bayinnaung, Alaungpaya, Nawngdawgyi, Hsinbyushin, and Bodawpaya—to exert control over Linzin (also known as Lanchang or Luang Frabang) as well as over Chiang Mai and other small states in the Lanna region of what is now northern Thailand. To the Siamese, these were all \textit{muang} Lao. In these campaigns, the rulers of the rival kingdom of Vientiane often sided with the Burmese. My reading of the Burmese \textit{weltpolitik} is that an important motivation in these campaigns was the desire to divert the inland trade onto routes under Burmese control and hence away from Ayutthaya and into the Burmese heartland.

\textsuperscript{27} The eastern trade corridor through Chanthaburi, then a Chinese enclave under Siamese suzerainty, was a very ancient route extending from the city
been the sea route direct to China (also out of reach). The Burmese may have reasoned that these remaining sources of economic competition would become irrelevant if Ayutthaya itself could be rendered helpless and its treasures carted off to Burma. In addition to acquiring Ayutthaya’s material wealth, the Konbaung kings may have been seeking to re-route international business to the new port city of Rangoon, which Alaungpaya had recently established with the intention that it would fulfill the role that had been played by Pegu in the 1500s.  

*Europeans, Trade, and the Burmese Invasion*

European accounts reveal that Ayutthaya continued to be a flourishing cosmopolitan city well into the 1700s. Contemporary European accounts provide valuable insight into the Siamese polity at the time of the campaigns of 1760-1767. The Siamese records themselves are of dubious value: most of Ayutthaya’s administrative records were destroyed in the conflagration that consumed the city in 1767, and one can hardly expect the official chronicle of the subsequent Chakri dynasty—compiled to memorialize the victorious General Chakri who founded the dynasty in 1782—to be complete and unbiased. Of particular value to the present article are eyewitness accounts by foreign residents who survived the campaigns of 1760 and 1767 or who were for other reasons in contact states of the lower Chao Phraya across to the Mekong River basin and thence either northward to Vientiane and Lanchang or southward to Cochin China and East Asia. It is noteworthy that after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767 Chanthaburi was one of the key areas protected by the Siamese forces as they regrouped to clear the country of the Burmese invaders.  

Given Alaungpaya’s ferocious repression of the Peguans in 1757, it would have been unthinkable for him to restore Pegu itself to the same level of commercial and national prominence Bayinnaung had given it earlier.  

28 For detailed descriptions of the cosmopolitan city at the end of the 1600s, including its inhabitants, buildings, wealth, and commerce, see Gervaise, *Natural and Political History*, 37–40, 61–63, 113–117; Guy Tachard, *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam Performed by Six Jesuits Sent by the French King, to the Indies and China in the Year 1685* (1688; reprint, Bangkok: White Orchid, 1985), 265–267; Kaempfer, *Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, 30–73; Simon de la Loubere, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam* (1693; reprint, A. P. Gen, trans., London: Thomas Horne), 112–113. For sources pertinent to the 1740s see Theodorus Jacobus van den Heuvel, whose journal of his journey in 1737 with King Borommanot on the king’s annual pilgrimage to the Buddha’s Footprint has been edited and translated by Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra as *In the King’s Trail*. See especially pp. 12–27. 

with the combatants. Among these accounts are those of French missionaries and of Dutch and English merchants and administrators.

From 1662 to 1688 the French missionaries in Siam had enjoyed considerable prestige and official protection. After 1688, they suffered intermittent imprisonment and persecution, but their position improved with King Borommatr's ascension to the throne in the mid-1700s. From then until the fall of Ayutthaya, the missionaries operated quite freely in the capital, interacting with the king and other court officers, establishing new churches, obtaining land concessions, and winning converts of non-Siamese origin.

Like the French missionaries, Dutch merchants were present in Ayutthaya throughout the early 1700s. Their trade did not flourish, but they kept the Ayutthaya station open for fear that if they withdrew, the English, who had traded there earlier, would return to take their place. The 1760 campaign cost the VOC a considerable amount of goods and money, despite the fact that some of the initial losses were later recovered. During the siege, the VOC's lodge was plundered by the Burmese, who reportedly kicked down the doors and stole the goods within. The Dutch director, Nicolaas Bang, drowned while trying to escape in a small boat; his son, Michiel, managed to save himself only by giving the Burmese money. Symes records that many English and Dutch were taken captive by the Burmese.

31 D. van der Cruyssse, Louis XIV et le Siam (Paris: Foyard, 1991), 191 and 215, refers to the royal favor that was extended to the French missionaries. See also Gervaise, Natural and Political History, 173-179, and Kaempfer, Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 52, the latter of whom writes of the imprisonment of the French bishop in the late 1600s. Around this time, the missionaries reported to Kaempfer that there were 3,600 Christians in Ayutthaya, though according to the testimony of Gervaise (Natural and Political History, 179) these would be mainly of non-Siamese origin.


34 See story of Nang Paan in Han ten Brummelhouw, Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat: A History of the Contacts between The Netherlands and Thailand (The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1987), 52. Goods and money that the Dutch had stored with Nang Paan were not fully returned. She is alleged to have been protected by princesses at Court and appears to have been working with a Dutch assistant named Beerendrecht.
The Fall of Ayutthaya: A Reassessment

It might be wondered how the Burmese hoped to develop trade while antagonizing the Europeans in this fashion. However the plunder of European commercial stations during wartime did not necessarily indicate an inherently anti-European or anti-commercial stance on the part of the Burmese. Alaungpaya and his successors combined a ferocity in warfare with an economic interest in trade, sometimes engaging in both with the same parties at the same time. In 1757, just three years before his troops would plunder the Dutch station at Ayutthaya, Alaungpaya signed a commercial treaty with the Dutch, who had been particularly interested in access to Burmese teak. 35 Similarly, in 1759, Burmese troops massacred the English stationed at Negrais, as the English were suspected of aiding the Mons, but almost immediately afterwards, the Burmese invited the English to resume trade. The invitation was issued to Walter Alves, who was trying to negotiate the freedom of the surviving Englishmen who had been captured at Negrais. In the course of these negotiations, Alves not only gained the release of the surviving Englishmen, but he also came close to gaining the freedom of three Dutchmen who were captured at Ayutthaya in 1760. His efforts on the latter case were thwarted only when another Dutchman, a former mate of the English Captain Sutherland who had embezzled the captain’s effects and taken refuge among the Burmese, passed to the king through one of his generals information to the effect that the Dutch captives could make gunpowder and therefore would be of great use to the Burmese. 36 Thus, while Alves sought to rescue prisoners, the Burmese treated the negotiations as a means of reopening commerce with the English. Alves’s records show that both Alaungpaya and his successor, Nawngdawgyi, were keen to resume trade, though the English eventually decided that Burma was too big of a risk for now.

We will return to the significance of trade in the closing pages of this article. We now turn to Ayutthaya’s conduct in the two campaigns and the evidence for its strength or weakness.

The 1760 Campaign

The Burmese Advance

In the absence of surviving records from Ayutthaya itself (the

36 Dalrymple, *Oriental Repertory*, 384-385. The three Dutchmen seen by Alves were part of the group of Dutch captives described by Han ten Brummelhuis (see Merchant, *Courtier and Diplomat*, 51).
Siamese chronicle of the Chakri dynasty was composed several decades later), the most useful information on the 1760 campaign comes from the Burmese Annals and from the French mission records on which Launay draws in his history of the French mission in Siam.\textsuperscript{37} The Burmese Annals, as translated by Phraison, state that Alaungpaya, his son Thiri Damayaza, and an army of forty regiments left Rangoon in January 1760, traveled by boat upriver to Hanthawadi (Pegu), proceeded overland to Martaban, and from there used boats again to dispatch one contingent of forces to attack Dawe (Tavoy) and to transport the remaining forces to Moulmein.\textsuperscript{38} From Moulmein, Alaungpaya reached Tavoy in thirteen marches. After waiting seven days for reinforcements to arrive by ship from Rangoon and Martaban, he proceeded to march on Mergui. The Annals record that Alaungpaya’s force consisted of 300 horses and 3,000 men under Mingaung Nawrahta and 500 horses and 5,000 men under Alaungpaya’s son, the Myedu Prince. Mergui, then part of Siamese territory, was readily captured, as was Tenasserim two days later. Mission records report that the French missionary Father Andrieux fled with the local Christians from Mergui to Pondicherry in India. His superior in Ayutthaya characterized the move as “imprudence,” for no one was permitted to leave Siam without the monarch’s consent, but in light of the ferocity with which Alaungpaya had destroyed Pegu in 1757, and in light of the massacre of the English at Negrais in 1759, Father Andrieux likely thought that staying in Mergui was too risky.\textsuperscript{39}

The Annals go on to say that when news of the actions at Mergui and Tenasserim reached Ayutthaya, the Siamese monarch mobilized a combined army of five regiments (300 horses and 7,000 men) under Bya Tezaw and 15 regiments (200 elephants, 1,000 horses, and 20,000 men) under Aukbya Yazawunthan. The Siamese confronted

\textsuperscript{37} A. Launay, Histoire.
\textsuperscript{38} S. Phraison (U Aung Thein), trans., “Intercourse between Burma and Siam as Recorded in Hmannan Yazawindawgyi,” \textit{Journal of the Siam Society} 11(3):5 (1914) [hereafter Phraison (1914)]. All further references to the Burmese Annals are to Phraison’s translations. The Burmese also sent forces to Tavoy from Chiang Mai, which the Burmese controlled at the time. The Chiang Mai Chronicle states that in the sixth month of 1760 (16 February–16 March) the Burmese and Mon forces at Chiang Mai “went down to attack Ayutthaya, going by way of Tavoy and capturing and killing the governor of Tavoy, then continuing on to Ayutthaya.” See Wyatt and Wichienkeoo, \textit{Chiang Mai Chronicle}, 131. See pp. 124–135 for Burmese-Chiang Mai relations from the 1500s to the 1700s.
\textsuperscript{39} Launay, Histoire, 2:140.
Alaungpaya in a narrow defile outside the town of Kui, but were forced to retreat. The Burmese subsequently took Phetburi and Ratburi. A second fierce engagement took place at Ban Lwin, where the Burmese were pressed hard until the timely arrival of the Myedu prince turned the battle in their favor. The Burmese then captured Supanburi. The Annals say that the Siamese king now made elaborate preparations for the defense of the capital, including the mounting of additional guns on the ramparts and the commandeering of elephants, horses, men, and provisions.\textsuperscript{40} He also dispatched a new force of 300 elephants, 3,000 horses, and 30,000 men to the Talan River to try to prevent the Burmese from crossing there.\textsuperscript{41} The Annals claim that on the eve of this engagement Alaungpaya’s commanders considered themselves outnumbered and facing hand-picked troops,\textsuperscript{42} though in fact the Burmese troops were probably better trained and armed.\textsuperscript{43} Sustained Siamese fire on the Burmese forces crossing the river inflicted heavy losses but failed to procure a Siamese victory. Five of the senior Siamese commanders were captured together with their war elephants. After this defeat, the Siamese concentrated on defending the capital. The Annals say that the Burmese now rested three days at Talan village, after which Alaungpaya “marched on to the Siamese capital and arrived on Friday the 11th of waxing Tagu 1121 (April AD 1760).”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Anthony Reid notes that after 1500 both Siam and Burma had used Portuguese and Muslim mercenaries as artillerymen, gunsmiths, and trainers, though it is not clear if the use of mercenaries in this role continued into the 1700s. The possession of large guns such as the ones used in Ayutthaya’s defense was a necessary part of a ruler’s symbolic and magical powers, and their casting was a royal prerogative. Large guns—cannons—came to be revered as sacred relics. See Anthony Reid, \textit{Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450–1680}, vol. 2 (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1993), 220–227.

\textsuperscript{41} Probably the Suphanburi River, also known as the Nakhon Chaisri River in mid-course and the Tha Chin River in its lower reaches. I am indebted to Kennon Breazeale for this information.


\textsuperscript{43} The same had been true two centuries earlier. Whereas Bayinnaung had effectively used a highly trained corps of musketeers in his invasions of Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya, Siam most likely relied on traditional massive levies of green foot soldiers, supplemented by foreign auxiliaries trained in firearms.

\textsuperscript{44} Phrairun (1914), 9. See also Launay, \textit{Histoire}, 2:140. Under the Eade system of dating, “11th waxing Tagu,” would actually be 27 March 1765. Phrairun may have actually meant “11th waning Tagu” (Friday, 11 April 1760), which...
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The French accounts generally agree with the Annals, saying that as the Burmese were approaching, King Borommaracha asked Prince Uthumphon to come out of his temple refuge to supervise the city's defense. An army of 15,000 was raised against the invaders, but it was completely defeated in battle, after which two more armies were raised and the fortifications of the city strengthened in preparation for renewed hostilities. King Borommaracha called upon the missionaries and lay Christians to aid in the defense, which they willingly did. The French missionary records state that on April 8, 1760, the Burmese were no more than two leagues (six miles) from Ayutthaya. On April 11 the Burmese burned the suburbs of the city, and on April 14 to 16 they bombarded the city itself. Then, unexpectedly, the Burmese withdrew. As the French records report, "Suddenly without anyone being able to determine the motive for this sudden departure, the Burmese raised the siege and retreated to Burma."45

The Burmese Retreat
Sources differ on the reasons for Alaungraya's sudden retreat. One version claims that a siege gun burst and mortally wounded the sovereign, forcing a hurried retreat so that he could reach Burmese territory before his death.46 Captain Symes, who visited Burma thirty years later, states to the contrary that Alaungraya's retreat and subsequent death were due to a "species of scrofula," a form of tuberculosis marked by swelling of the lymph nodes in the neck, which at the time was usually fatal.47 Disease of a different type was cited by Arprakarmani, a Burmese general who later that year headed an abortive attempt to re-establish Burmese control over Chiang Mai (which a few months earlier had supported the invasion of Ayutthaya but was now in rebellion). In his deposition to the Siamese forces to whom he surrendered, Arprakarmani stated that on arriving in Ayutthaya, Alaungraya "became ill with

would be consistent both with his interpretation of this date as "April" and with the chronology provided by the missionary records. I am indebted to Kennon Breazeale for this observation.
45 The information in this paragraph comes from Launay, Histoire, 2:140.
47 Symes, An Account, 51. Symes comments that Alaungraya’s two immediate successors died of the same disease. Nawngdawgyi died of it in March 1764, and Hsinbyushin succumbed in 1776 (An Account, 61, 75).
consumption due to venereal disease.\textsuperscript{48}

Whatever his ailment, illness was most likely the reason for Alaungpaya’s retreat. The Chronicle of Chiang Mai states that Alaungpaya’s followers, according to custom, wished to regain their own country before his death, so that they could render him due honors. According to the Chiang Mai Chronicle, the captured Burmese general Arprakarmeni reported that the Burmese forces retreated by way of Raheng and that Alaungpaya died between there and the Burmese border.\textsuperscript{49} Lieberman states more specifically that Alaungpaya died on 11 May 1760 at the village of Kinywa, within three days’ march of Martaban.\textsuperscript{50} Alaungpaya’s son is said to have carried his father’s bier in a palanquin to the family seat at Moksobo, where the body was cremated with white and red sandalwood and the flames quenched with rose water. The bones were placed in a new earthen pot which was then gilded and dropped in the middle of the river.\textsuperscript{51}

On 2 May 1760, with the permission of the Siamese government, the French bishop caused a solemn \textit{Te Deum} to be sung in thanks for the deliverance of the city. In gratitude for this gesture, King Borommaracha is said to have presented gifts of rice and cloth to the Christians who helped defend the city. According to French mission records, Monseigneur Brigit received an audience with the king, who, on seeing the prelate, descended from his throne to declare that the missionaries had done greater service to the Siamese in the recent engagement than all their predecessors had done in introducing the country to the curiosities of Europe.\textsuperscript{52} The king evidently had an eye on the internal political situation, however, for he was careful not to offend the Buddhist clergy by bestowing on the head of the Vicars Apostolic in Siam the title of Bishop, which would have resonated too strongly of the days of King Narai, remembered as a time of excessive French influence.

\textsuperscript{49} Notton, \textit{Chronique de Xiang Mai}, 182–186.
\textsuperscript{50} Lieberman, \textit{Burmese Administrative Cycles}, 269.
\textsuperscript{51} Phraison and Subindu, “Testimony of an Inhabitant,” 38.
\textsuperscript{52} Launay, \textit{Histoire}, 2:141.

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The Insignificance of the Siamese Succession Disputes

Alaungpaya’s death initiated a Burmese succession dispute. His dying wish was that his sons should each reign as king for a time, and this idea proved a recipe for dissension that continued right up to the end of the Konbaung dynasty in 1885. In light of the supposedly debilitating effects of succession disputes on Ayuthaya’s defenses, it is worth noting that such disputes were endemic in both Siam and Burma. In both countries royal polygamy resulted in numerous possible heirs, and succession disputes were by consequence a constant part of court life. In some cases, these disputes constituted training exercises for military preparedness. On other occasions, challenges to the royal succession amounted to little more than palace intrigues. The important point is that this factiousness did not prevent the Burmese court from assembling the most feared and successful military machine in latter eighteenth-century mainland Southeast Asia. One might question, therefore, whether the political maneuvering that followed King Borommakot’s death in 1758 necessarily paralyzed the city’s political, economic, and military operations, as is sometimes suggested.

Certainly, the 1760 campaign does not in itself reflect any inherent weakness or unpreparedness on the part of the Ayuthayan polity. On the contrary, it suggests that during the critical years of 1760–1767 the two primary heirs to the throne placed state interests ahead of their personal interests. By the time of King Borommakot’s death on 13 April 1758, Prince Uthumphon had been designated heir apparent. His ascension was initially opposed by three senior princes who gathered their forces and armed themselves with weapons from the royal arsenal. But with the support of key powerbrokers in the palace and the Buddhist establishment, Uthumphon overcame and executed these challengers. Shortly thereafter he gave up the crown and retired to a monastery, allowing his brother to reign as King Borommaracha. As already noted, during the 1760 campaign Uthumphon acceded to his brother’s request that he come out of the monastery to assume command of the city’s defenses, after which he returned to the monastery.

*Could Alaungpaya Have Taken Ayutthaya?*

Rather than the Siamese being negligent in matters of defense, the 1760 campaign reveals that it was the Burmese forces that were unprepared, for they had not prepared properly for the exigencies of the rainy season or for a sustained campaign against the well-fortified and ably defended city. The Annals suggest that the Burmese generals were aware of this problem, representing their concerns as follows:

>[A]s it was already the beginning of May\(^5\) the rains would soon break and the whole country round the capital would then be inundated when, not only the elephants and horses of the enemy would be in great trouble, but even the men would find it hard to discover a dry spot on which to cook their food; that they would then be obliged to raise the siege and retrace their steps, and the Siamese could choose to attack or not as they pleased. . . . [R]etreat was a matter of certainty if the Siamese would simply guard the capital from capture . . . [and] in the meanwhile send some conciliatory message to the Burmese Monarch . . . His Siamese Majesty . . . accordingly reinforced the defenses of the capital, both on the walls of the city and in the boats and ships in the river; orders were also sent to the surrounding governors to redouble their energies in the defence of their towns.

The Annals hint that the Burmese would have retreated even if Alaungpaya had not fallen ill. According to these records, the Burmese generals Mingaung Nawrahta and the Myedu Prince advised that they should raise the siege and return to Burma with the intention of resuming the conflict later. Mingaung Nawrahta noted that the expedition had commenced late in the dry season, that the invading army had consumed excessive amounts of time in coming by way of Tenasserim and capturing various towns on the way, and that the army was wasted by disease. Though the wasting of the army by mosquitoes, flies, and sickness was normal for a force

\(^5\) Kennon Breazeale has suggested to me that Phraison’s identification of the Burmese lunar month *kason* with the European month May is misleading. In 1760, the month of *kason* began on 15 April. Phraison’s translation may be more accurately rendered as “it was already mid-April.” Such a correction would be consistent with the records of the French missionaries in Lainay’s *Histoire* cited above, which have the Burmese withdrawing after bombarding the city on 16 April.
of this type at this time, the overall tenor of the generals’ advice suggests that the invaders considered an extended siege inopportune.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition these problems, Alaungpaya had ignored the earlier example of Bayinnaung, who had mounted a successful campaign against Ayutthaya by first securing Chiang Mai as a support base and then subduing the provincial towns in the north-central plain, thus denying the capital access to additional men and supplies.\textsuperscript{56} The Burmese invaders would thereby also have acquired T’ai reinforcements for their own army.\textsuperscript{57} Lieberman states that in the absence of these northern T’ai auxiliaries and supplies, Alaungpaya’s army “could not organize a systematic blockade. His siege guns were inadequate to pierce the walls. Nor was a frontal assault feasible against caltrops, artillery, and a mass of protecting streams and canals.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Ayutthaya Between Campaigns}

Siam recovered quickly from the 1760 invasion. In late 1760, Chiang Mai rebelled against the Burmese, in whose sphere of influence it had been for the previous two hundred years. Burmese troops who were sent to re-establish control were defeated, and their commanding general, Arprakarmani, was captured by the Siamese.\textsuperscript{59} The Siamese were also strong in the west, where they regained control of Mergui by 1761 if not earlier.\textsuperscript{60} Towards the southeast, the Siamese king may have sent his forces as far as Ha

\textsuperscript{55} Phraison (1914), 10-11.
\textsuperscript{57} V. B. Lieberman, “Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma,” \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 12(3):482 (1978), analyzes the polyethnic nature of the so-called Mon-Burmese conflicts in the 1700s. In these conflicts, as well as in the wars with Siam, ethnic identity was not necessarily the determining factor for political loyalty. These were not national conflicts as such; rather, they were dynastic and regional struggles for supremacy. Michael Aung-Thwin likewise deplores the tendency to develop analytical historical frameworks by reference to ethnic differences. The Burmese chronicles, he notes, “seldom depicted ethnicity as a cause of major historical events.” See Michael Aung-Thwin, “The Myth of the ‘Three Shan Brothers’ and the Ava Period in Burmese History,” \textit{Journal of Asian Studies} 55(4):897 (1996).
\textsuperscript{58} Lieberman, \textit{Burmese Administrative Cycles}, 268.
\textsuperscript{59} See Notton, \textit{Chronique de Xiang Mai}, 183-186.
\textsuperscript{60} Brummelhuis, \textit{Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat}, 51.
Tien in southern Vietnam.\textsuperscript{61} Nevertheless, the records of both the French and the Dutch speak of increasing disunity and folly after the 1760 attacks. A revolt broke out in one of the Siamese provinces and was put down only with considerable difficulty. Disorder erupted in the government, whose instability was marked by a continual changing of high officials. The foreigners' records generally voice regret that Prince Uthumphon returned to the monastery after the 1760 crisis rather than continuing on in the court, where his presence would likely have been a stabilizing force. The foreigners also complained that the king reportedly allowed his power to be suborned by the princesses. Monseigneur Brigot writes that whereas formerly the will of the sovereign was the supreme law in the kingdom, now each princess had as much power as the king. Previous kings had punished treason, murder, and arson with death, but the greed of the princesses converted this punishment to confiscation of the property of the accused for the princesses' own benefit. The high officials followed their example, squeezing as much as they could from people caught up in the legal processes.\textsuperscript{62} Even the Burmese seem to have gotten wind of the princesses' influence; the Burmese sources used by Harvey claim that, during the siege of 1765-1767, "Often the palace guns ceased fire because the king yielded to the entreaties of his harem who were terrified by the noise."\textsuperscript{63}

In the midst of this situation, the Siamese king was increasingly suspicious of potential challengers. For example, in 1761 he placed his half-brother Prince Thep Phiphit under house arrest in Mergui, and he became suspicious of the Prince's contacts with the Dutch, with whom he seemed allied. In 1762 the Dutch East India Company authorities in Batavia sent two envoys to Siam to seek King

\textsuperscript{61} See G. Aubaret, trans. and ed., \textit{Histoire et Description de la Basse Cochinchine}, part 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1863), 25–38. Aubaret states that in November 1766 (almost certainly the wrong date, since Ayutthaya was under siege the entire year), the Leper King of Siam (Borommaracha, so known because of a severe skin disease), prepared a naval expedition against Ha-Tien. Aubaret says Borommaracha "continuously went to war against his neighbors, who hated and feared him because of his great cruelties" and that the Cantonese governor of the province accordingly made immediate preparations for the defense of Ha-Tien. The Vietnamese are said to have sent a flotilla and a military unit to reinforce the defenses of Ha-Tien against the Siamese attack. I am grateful to Kennon Breazeale for bringing this source to my attention.

\textsuperscript{62} Launay, \textit{Histoire}, 2:141.

\textsuperscript{63} G. E. Harvey, \textit{History of Burma} (London: Longmans, 1925), 252.
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Borommaracha's permission to install Prince Thep Phiphit on the throne of Kandy, in Ceylon. The king refused to meet with these men, having apparently been advised by the French bishop that they were "secret agents plotting to seize the Siamese throne for Prince Thep Phiphit." Shortly thereafter, the Dutch authorities in Batavia sent a merchant envoy directly to Mergui, and in response the prince was removed to Ayuthaya.

The king was also becoming suspicious of Prince Uthumphon, who had so graciously ceded him the throne in 1758. In 1760, the king had reportedly relied on Uthumphon to organize the capital's defenses. By contrast, when the Burmese entered the captured city in 1767, they found Prince Uthumphon in chains.

The Campaign of 1765-1767

Criticisms by the French and Dutch Observers

The French and Dutch continued to be critical of the Siamese leadership as the campaign of 1765-1767 commenced. The French mission records state bluntly that debauchery and greed combined to lose the kingdom of Siam. The Dutch accounts agree, commenting on the panic and the "theatre of follies" that dominated Ayutthaya from the approach of the renewed Burmese attack in May 1765 to the final disaster in April 1767. European accounts written after the fact continued to accuse the Siamese of losing the war through their own disarray. As with the 1760 campaign, the new Burmese offensive made itself felt first in Mergui. The Dutch records state that when the Burmese forces continued their advance following that city's capture, King Borommaracha received the news with joy, somehow persuading himself that, contrary to fact, the Burmese troops were not on their way to attack his own capital.

Whether or not the Siamese king and his court were impervious to the impending storm, the foreign community was not. The French Bishop of Tabraca and Vicar Apostolic of Siam, Monsignor Brigot,

64 Brummelhuis, Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat, 51.
65 Launay, Histoire, 2:145.
66 Brummelhuis, Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat, 52
67 Father Vincentius Sangermano, for example, said that "[Ayutthaya] was taken and sacked; more perhaps through the cowardice of the Siamese, or rather the dissensions that distracted the court, than by any valor on the part of the Burmese." Vincentius Sangermano, A Description of the Burmese Empire Compiled Chiefly from Burmese Documents (1833; 5th reprint, William Tandy, ed. and trans., London: Susil Gupta, 1966), 62, emphasis added.
sensed the danger and directed two of his priests, Fathers Artaud and Kerhervé, to take their forty pupils and seek the safety of Chantaburi in the southeast.\textsuperscript{68} The bishop himself elected to remain with his flock (many of whom were government officials) and was later taken captive along with them.\textsuperscript{69} The Dutch director, Abraham Werndlij, had commenced making defensive preparations in 1763.\textsuperscript{70} His letter of 18 November 1765 to the authorities in Batavia is one of the few extant eyewitness accounts of the events of this time. As the Burmese were invading the city, Werndlij secretly prepared a boat and, taking with him the persons, families, and relatives of his assistant, Johannes van den Berg, and a certain Michiel Bang, plus the widow of the former Dutch overseer, Michiel Corbonne, and her children, sailed to a point near Bangkok and thence to safety in Batavia.\textsuperscript{71}

However, these reports of dissension and mismanagement among the Siamese leaders, in whom the Europeans had so completely lost confidence, must not be taken at face value. One suspects that the Europeans were simply imposing their own values on events about which they had only partial knowledge. For the Burmese records suggest that in 1765-1767 the Siamese conducted a tenacious defense, and the kingdom’s rapid resurgence after 1767 suggests that its fundamental strengths remained sound even after the capital’s destruction.

\textit{The Burmese Advance}

In several ways Hsinbyushin’s campaign of 1765-1767 was markedly different from Alaungpaya’s campaign of 1760. His method of advance cut some of Ayutthaya’s trade routes while also allowing him to integrate into his own forces the armies of

\textsuperscript{68} Launay, \textit{Histoire}, 2:228.
\textsuperscript{69} Paul Ambroise Bigandet’s reference to the arrival in Rangoon of Bishop Brigit says that “[h]e had come over from Siam, with the Christian captives, after the taking of Juthia, by the Burmese, under their King Tsin biao Shihin” (\textit{An Outline of the History of the Catholic Burmese Mission from the Year 1720 to 1887} [Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1887; reprint, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996], 19).
\textsuperscript{70} Brummelhuis, \textit{Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat}, 52.
\textsuperscript{71} G. William Skinner, \textit{Chinese Society in Thailand} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), 19, notes Turpin’s statement that the 6,000 Chinese who defended the Dutch factory, located outside the walls to the southeast of the city, were presented with 10,000 British pounds as a mark of special favor for their efforts. The Chinese also played the leading role in a vain attempt to defend the Christian churches.
neighboring states and even of Ayutthaya’s outlying provinces. The first of Hsinbyushin’s three invading armies moved southward along the coast to take Tavoy, Mergui, and Tenasserim before moving back north toward Ayutthaya. A second proceeded southeast through the Three Pagodas Pass. A third went into the north and into Laos, severing trade routes and gathering reinforcements from vanquished Siamese provinces as it advanced southward to Ayutthaya. In the course of the campaign, sixteen out of nineteen of the Siamese provincial governors switched sides and fought against their countrymen. One of these, the governor of Suphanburi, lost his life in the service of the Burmese.72

In addition to gathering reinforcements and provisions from the captured communities, Hsinbyushin’s army had prepared for a long campaign. Whereas in 1760 the Burmese forces had feared spending the wet season before Ayutthaya, they began the present campaign at the start of the rains and had prepared in advance to stay in the field through more than one wet season, being equipped even to grow their own rice.73

The Siamese Defense
In the face of this well-planned offensive, the Siamese mounted a spirited defense. Harvey’s summary of the records from the Burmese chronicle Konbaungset conveys a picture of a desperately contested campaign that was fought hard on both sides. The Burmese advance was slow and gradual, since, as Harvey puts it, the Burmese had to “storm town after town,” and even “found the villages stockaded” against them. The Burmese armies stayed in the field the year round, “a rare thing for Burmese levies,” and as they advanced during the rainy season they quartered in the towns they won. Sometimes the converging Burmese armies “were ... besieged themselves, for the Ayuthia armies came out and pressed them hard, striving to prevent their effecting a junction.” But finally the converging Burmese armies joined before Ayutthaya, at which point “The rains came and flooded them out; they stood their ground.

72 Sunait, On Both Sides of the Tenasserim Range, 82. While these defections may indicate a loosening of administrative control from the center, as Pombeira claims, they do not constitute proof of a general cultural decline, and the weight of other testimonials, such as those of resident missionaries and merchants and of the Sinhalese envoys who visited in Ayutthaya in 1751, suggest that the city remained a very desirable destination for foreign visitors.
73 Koeng, The Burmese Polity, 16.
Their commanders died of hardship: they did not lose heart..."

The city was now invested, but the ensuing siege continued to be full of dangers for the Burmese:

During the first open season they could not get near the walls because of the numerous stockades outside the city. Sometimes the whole plain was alive with swarms of Siamese working under the supervision of grandees who were carried about in sedan chairs. Both sides used bamboo matting between two uprights containing earth for temporary defense while they constructed permanent works... The Siamese seeing [the Burmese stockade builders] scattered in isolated groups attacked them in boats.74

Overall, this particular Burmese account suggests two well-matched and desperate antagonists. We hear of the Siamese flotilla attacking the Burmese in their boats, the Siamese leader, his sword waving, hurling shouts of defiance at the invaders until he is finally brought down with a musket shot. The great guns of Ayutthaya, over thirty feet long and capable of shooting 100-pound balls, wreak havoc amongst the Burmese boats, and the Burmese commander Maha Nawrahta is killed, leaving Neimyo Thihapate to finish the campaign on his own.

*The Burmese Victory and the Destruction of Ayutthaya*

At about this time the Chinese attacked Burma’s northern borders. To resist this threat, King Hsinbyushin needed to recall his forces from Siam. His order of 9 January 1767 directed Neimyo Thihapate to finish off the campaign speedily, destroy the city of Ayutthaya, and return to Burma with the captured Siamese king and his subjects.75

Purported eyewitness accounts by the Armenian Anthony Goyaton and the Arab priest Seyed Ali (contained in records now housed in the Indonesian National Archives in Djakarta) state that one night while the city was surrounded by floodwaters, the Burmese approached in boats and, forcing the defenders back by throwing earthenware pots of gunpowder at them, scaled the walls with ladders. This version of events claims that the Burmese were

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74 The entire section to this point has been taken from Harvey, *History of Burma*, 251–252.
75 Phraison, (1914) 37, 44.
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aided by

500 of their countrymen who were in the town having been
captured by the Siamese on various previous occasions, with
whom they had been in secret communication.\textsuperscript{76}

Eyewitnesses or no, the Burmese sources give a different account.
The Burmese chronicle summarized by Harvey says that the city's
walls had been undermined by tunnels dug beneath them.\textsuperscript{77} Sunait,
also citing Burmese sources, notes that during the siege the Burmese
dug five tunnels under the walls of the city and that these
cavitations led to the wall's collapse. The Burmese Annals indicate
that the Siamese demonstrated admirable courage in storming the
forts built to protect the tunnels.\textsuperscript{78}

Both the Dutch and Burmese sources describe a thorough
destruction of the city in the aftermath of its fall. The eyewitnesses
reported in the Dutch source cited by Brummelhuis say the
following:

Most of the citizens who escaped the fire alive were murdered by
the Burmese, who divided the remainder into various parties in
accordance with the number of people in authority and took them
away, having first burned the Company's lodge.\textsuperscript{79}

The Burmese chronicle summarized by Harvey describes the scene
as follows:

The slaughter was indiscriminate. The king's body was
identified next day near the west gate by his brother whom the
Burmese found in chains and released. The houses, the
monasteries, the temples, the great palace itself went up in
flame. . . . The princes, the harem, the clergy, the foreigners
including a French Catholic bishop, and thousands of the
population were carried away into captivity. . . . Such of the

\textsuperscript{76} Brummelhuis, \textit{Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat}, 55. The Burmese had
reportedly used similar "Trojan Horse" tactics earlier against the Mons of
Pegu.

\textsuperscript{77} Harvey, \textit{History of Burma}, 252-253.

\textsuperscript{78} Sunait, \textit{On Both Sides of the Tenasserim Range}, 49; Phraison (1914), 44-45.

\textsuperscript{79} Brummelhuis, \textit{Merchant, Courier, and Diplomat}, 55.
guns as were too big to move were burst or thrown into the rivers.\textsuperscript{80}

The Burmese Annals translated by Phraison provide additional information, recording the immense treasure that the raiders took away as plunder:

The Burmese soldiery seized men, women, gold, silver jewels etc. and confusion and disorder reigned supreme. . . . A large quantity of royal treasure was found in the shape of utensils set in diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and nine kinds of gems: also gold cups, bowls, trays used by the royalty; and gold and silver bullion and precious gems; cloths worked in silver and gold, and various other kinds of cloths the product of Kyin, Sein, and Gyun countries; seven richly gilt howdahs used by His Siamese Majesty.\textsuperscript{81}

The Annals also list some 2,000 members of the Siamese royal family who were taken as captives to Burma. This list includes the late king’s brother, Prince Uthumphon (called “Bra-on-saw San” in the Annals), who was found in close confinement with a ring around his neck (\textit{cangue}, or “neck yoke”), which the Burmese removed.\textsuperscript{82} The phrakhlang was also taken captive, though he apparently poisoned himself on the journey to Burma. As for King Borommaracha himself, the manner of his demise is in dispute. Harvey’s Burmese source (quoted above) implies that he was killed by the Burmese, while Phraison’s Burmese source says that he was killed by the Siamese. The two sources are guessing, of course, for both say that his body was found the next day among those who had fallen at the west gate, and both say that his remains were identified by his

\textsuperscript{80} Harvey, \textit{History of Burma}, 252–253.
\textsuperscript{81} Phraison (1914), 49, 52. See also Koenig (\textit{The Burmese Polity}, 253) who states: “There was gold, silver and jewels in abundance, for the royal treasure was immense. This is the secret of these continual attacks on Ayuthia: it was at once a thriving seaport and a king’s palace, one of the wealthiest cities in Indo-China, so that its treasures were a standing temptation to the Burmese hordes.”
\textsuperscript{82} Phraison (1914), 48–50. According to Dr. Rujaya Abhakorn, Department of History, Chiang Mai University (personal communication), it is thought Uthumphon lived out his life as a monk in northern Burma and to have died at Sagaing. Dr. Abhakorn visited the prince’s supposed grave site in December 1998.
brother, Prince Uthumphon. Some Thai sources dispute even this claim, saying that Borommaracha survived the siege by fleeing from his palace in a boat and then wandering about in the jungle until he either died from hunger and exposure or else was captured by the Burmese and died of “natural causes.”

Evidence for a Strong Ayutthaya
What is interesting about the Burmese accounts of the 1767 invasion is their depiction of Ayutthaya as a stoutly-defended city that succumbed only at the last moment after a long siege. The account of the Arab and the Armenian that appears in the Dutch archives likewise implies a well-defended city, because it suggests that Ayutthaya fell only through a stratagem involving help from Burmese living within the city’s walls. Lorraine Gesick, noting the mythic character of the historical record of the events surrounding the destruction of Ayutthaya, has commented that the chronicles of the succeeding Chakri dynasty tended to interpret the events in Buddhist moral terms, seeing the fall of Ayutthaya as the result of the Ayutthayan kings’ waning adherence to dhamma and righteousness. The criticism that subsequent Siamese records level against the Ayutthayan monarchs may also express vengeance against leaders thought responsible for a national defeat. The Burmese and foreigners’ accounts suggest that these criticisms were unfair.

Ayutthaya’s fate after its capture in the 1500s was very different from its fate in 1767. In the 1500s Bayinnaung had treated Ayutthaya as a vassal state to be incorporated within the mandala of his sphere of influence as a chakravartin king. The city’s destruction in 1767 suggests, by contrast, that King Hsinbyushin had no intention of incorporating the defeated kingdom into his own realm. Rather, he appeared to have been implementing a politico-economic strategy intended to weaken a dangerous rival irreparably by destroying its marketplace and by depleting its manpower through the

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83 Phraison (1914), 48–49.
84 Reported in W. A. R. Wood, A History of Siam (Bangkok: Siam Baanakich, 1933), 249.
86 Sunait, On Both Sides of the Tenasserim Range, 58
deportation or killing of its citizens. Everything about the campaign suggests that Ayutthaya was considered a formidable opponent. Had Ayutthaya been perceived to be weak and ineptly led, would the Burmese have prepared so well for such a long siege? Would King Hsinbyushin have sent his two ablest commanders to lead the campaign? And would he have planned the very cunning pincer movement by which his armies converged on Ayutthaya from the south through Pegu, Martaban, and Tavoy, and from the north through Chiang Mai, thus depriving the capital of reinforcements from the outlying provinces? All of these questions must be answered in the negative. The Burmese Annals convey a picture of a well-prepared and well-sustained Siamese defense. The kingdom’s aggressive military activities between the two Burmese invasions suggests that its military prowess was considerable, certainly more than is indicated in most of the French and Dutch records of the period. Furthermore, the extensive material and human booty that the Burmese carried away implies that Ayutthaya was to the end a wealthy polity whose very strength attracted the envious attention of the Burmese.

Perhaps the greatest testament to Ayutthaya’s strength lies in the fact that the Siamese recovered all of Ayutthaya’s former territory within three years of the city’s destruction. The generals Phya Tak and Phya Chakri (among others) immediately took to the field with new armies, clearing the land of the invaders and mounting campaigns in almost every dry season. Over the next forty years, Siam fought almost continuously against Konbaung Burma, with Phya Tak and Phya Chakri fighting eleven campaigns in the first fifteen years alone. Throughout this period Siam strengthened and re-shaped itself, extending its territories east and south while simultaneously developing its trade routes. Siam’s strength and wealth was sufficient to build two new capital cities, the first at Thonburi and the second across the river at Bangkok. The royal

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87 H. G. Quaritch Wales, Ancient Siamese Government and Administration (London: Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., 1934), 9, notes that “Loss of population by captivity was infinitely more serious than the comparatively small numbers of those killed in actual fighting.” The available manpower was depleted by the numbers of those who either fled to the jungle to escape the corvée or entered the Buddhist priesthood, and by high rates of infant mortality. Thus, “preservation of the nation’s manpower [was] one of the chief preoccupations of the Siamese government.”

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court also instituted a huge temple-building program that brought some two thousand revered Buddhist images from temples in the countryside to new temples in Bangkok, and it put into place the legal, administrative, political, cultural, and social institutions that allowed Sino-Thai trade to prosper.89

As Hong Lysa has shown, Siam's resurgence after 1767 employed the same economic patterns that had been used at Ayutthaya, in that all commerce passed through the hands of the king; trade was "mainly a state enterprise [and the] king was the country's chief trader."90 She shows that commercial links with China were quickly re-established both on a state-to-state basis and within the traditional tributary system, as Siam offered rice and sapan-wood in exchange for the construction materials, craftsmen, and artisans needed for its extensive building projects. Siam quickly became an important emporium in China's South seas trade, a role it retained until rapidly rising Singapore displaced it in the 1830s.91

Conclusion

The Burmese campaigns of the 1760s were a resumption of a centuries-long struggle that had commenced in the 1500s and that would continue until the First Anglo-Burmese War took the Burmese out of contention in 1824. This conflict was a struggle for control of international trade routes both east and west and for consequent preeminence in mainland Southeast Asia. For its own strategic survival, Konbaung Burma needed to deliver a knockout blow to its wealthy rival to the east; equally, the Siamese capital needed to rise quickly from the ashes and reconstruct its glory and


90 Hong Lysa, Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 42–43.

91 Hong Lysa, Thailand in the Nineteenth Century, 42–43; J. W. Cushman, Fields from the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1993), 67ff.

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pre-eminence. In the end, this conflict would be terminated by the expanding European colonial presence, while the rise of Singapore and advances in shipbuilding would make control of the transpeninsular route at Tenasserim economically insignificant. In the short run, however, the Burmese effort to gain economic hegemony by destroying Ayutthaya was a failure, as Siam quickly rose from Ayutthaya’s ashes to become once again a major political and economic player.

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