

# Further Travels in Laos and in Yunnan

*The Mekong Exploration Commission Report  
(1866-1868)—Volume 2*

**Francis Garnier**



Further Travels in Laos and in Yunnan: The  
Garnier Francis

\***LAO.3675.00**\*

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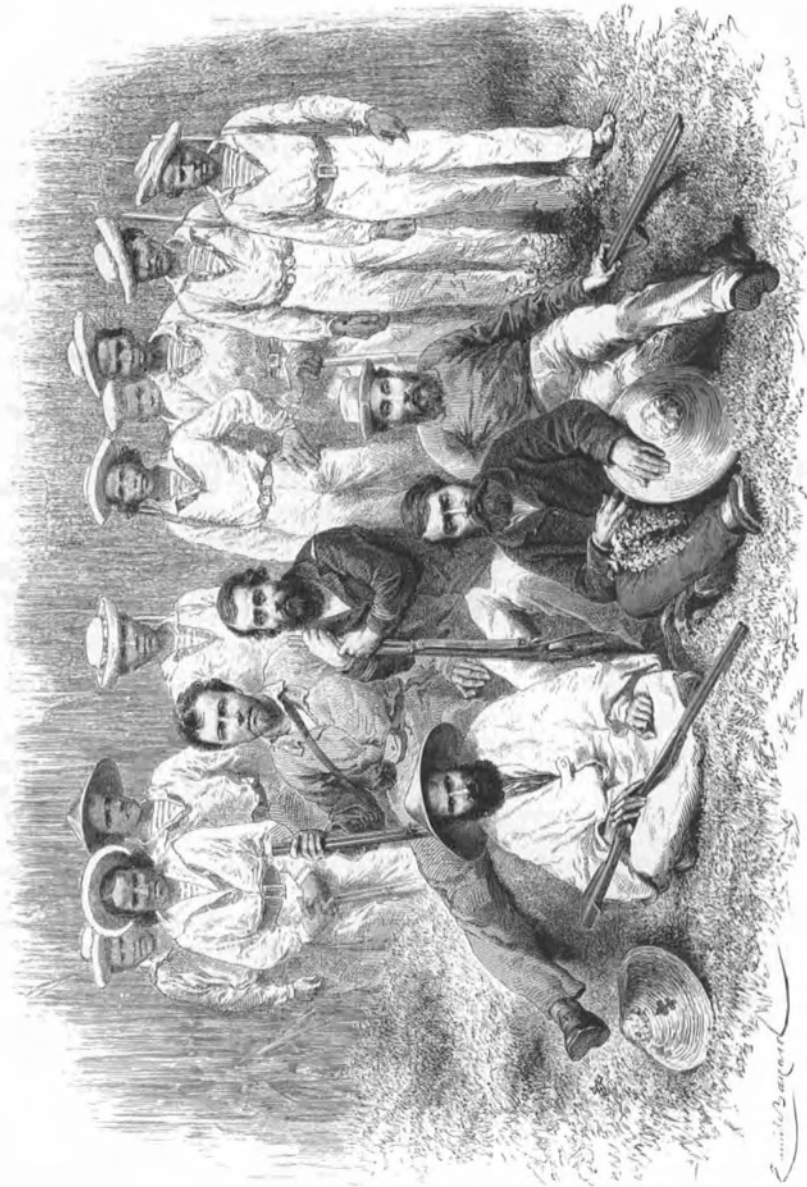
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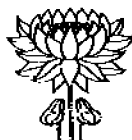
The French Commission and its escort at the arrival in Han-kéou (Hanoi): L. de Carné, L. Joubert, F. Garnier, C. Thorel and L. Delaporte (drawing by É. Bayard, based on a photograph).

# Further Travels in Laos and in Yunnan

*The Mekong Exploration Commission Report  
(1866-1868)—Volume 2*

**Francis Garnier**

Translated  
and with an Introduction by  
Walter E. J. Tips



**White Lotus Press**

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Parts of this volume were originally published in various issues of *Le Tour du Monde*, 1869-1871 and in F. Garnier, *Voyage d'Exploration en Indo-Chine*, 1885, Hachette & Cie, Paris.

White Lotus Co. Ltd.

G.P.O. Box 1141

Bangkok 10501

Printed in Thailand

Typeset by Theerayut Ua-fua.

ISBN 974-8496-75-9 pbk. White Lotus Co. Ltd., Bangkok

ISBN 1-879155-75-3 pbk. White Lotus Co. Ltd., Cheney

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## Introduction

This book is a translation of the second part of the report of the Commission for the Exploration of the Mekong. It continues the itinerary of the first book: Francis Garnier, *Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos*. Both books are complemented by the third volume in this English edition published by White Lotus: Louis Delaporte and Francis Garnier, *A Pictorial Journey on the Old Mekong: Cambodia, Laos and Yunnan*, which presents a fuller pictorial record of the Commission's itinerary. All volumes are available separately.

The spelling of place names in this book follow the original. In some cases the Romanization differs from modern usage, but to have introduced any changes in the text could have made it difficult for the reader to follow the Commission's itinerary on the maps. In most cases, the differences are not great, and readers should have no difficulty identifying the modern names of the places mentioned.

The Commission arrived in Luang Prabang, then a fairly independent kingdom under the tutelage of the Siamese government in Bangkok but also paying tribute to other neighboring states at various times during this period, to spend some time there awaiting better weather conditions. Present-day northern Laos was less peaceful then. The various principalities were constantly at war and the Muslim rebellion in Yunnan displaced other tribes who sought refuge and a livelihood in the neighboring small states. All these were nominally under the tutelage of China, Siam, Annam or British India. The Shan States were the latter's most distant outpost in this part of the world but even the British were not keen to interfere in the internecine struggles among the various tribes.

*Travels in Cambodia and Part of Laos* ended with a decision to follow the course of the Mekong, hoping that the rumors, about wars in the countries the French expedition was now entering, had been exaggerated. The route chosen was along the Mekong river, in keeping with the primary objective of the mission, to explore and study the great river and, if at all possible, find ways to extend French governmental and commercial influence into the countries adjoining Tonkin and Annam.

Francis Garnier ended the first volume with a description of the conditions in which the Commission now found itself. In Luang Prabang, most of the data collected so far, including collections of plants and geological samples, were sent to Bangkok. There too, the members of the Commission reduced their personal belongings to the strict minimum for the remainder of the journey. The reasons were twofold. First, a possible shift to an overland route would not allow much luggage to be carried. Secondly, the members of the expedition already realized that there were insufficient funds to complete the exploration—a mishap brought on them by an excessively long stay in Lower Laos, while they waited for the necessary passports from China to catch up with the expedition. In the end, it was Francis Garnier himself who traveled back to Phnom Penh to collect the passports. He noted the great indifference with which the whole undertaking was treated by the authorities in the French colony of Cochinchina of which the countries being explored would have been the logical commercial extensions.

Thus, in light boats, with lighter baggage and very light wallets indeed, the members of the expedition and their Annamite and Tagal escort left, on a beautiful day in May 1867, with a heavy heart for what they sensed would be a tumultuous adventure rather than a peaceful journey of scientific exploration.

Dr. Walter E. J. Tips

June 1996

## Chapter 1

### *Departure from Luang Prabang—The caves of Pak Hou*

At the moment of our departure from Luang Prabang, the effects of the first rains had already made themselves felt on the river, the waters of which had risen more than one meter. We embarked on the morning of 25 May 1867. A nice south-westerly breeze and the natural freshness of our aquatic route promised a less hot, more pleasant day than those we had spent in our camp.

A little distance from the city, the river narrowed and took on a wild and turbulent appearance. The mountains on the banks showed their serrated crests and their rocky surfaces. Their last shelves, which overhung the river, were often surmounted by pyramids, the tombs of pious monks or the shrines of supposed relics, the upward-thrusting forms of which harmonized with the landscape. A little above Luang Prabang, on the left bank of the river, one of these *thats* appeared; it was picturesquely situated at a corner formed by the river and a small affluent. The mountain that served as its pedestal was called Phou Kieo. A little further, on the opposite bank and at the entrance to one of these caves that were so plentiful in the calcareous rocks, there was a gigantic statue of the Buddha.

In the evening, we arrived at the confluence of the Nam Hou, the river which Commander de Lagrée had thought of ascending for a while. Across from its mouth and on the right bank of the river, high cliffs rose up vertically. On their flank was a cave deeper than the preceding ones and which the indigenous people had transformed into a sanctuary. We climbed to it with the help of the steps cut out of the rocks. The breaks in the rock constituted a sort of balcony, the pillars and the balustrade of which were completed and regularized by the hand of man, outside the gigantic and irregular opening to the cave. The view of the river from there was imposing. It was no longer an infinite perspective in which the blue of the water and the sky merged in dazzling light and in which only the far-off rows

of palm trees and the huts half hidden in their shadows interrupted the contours of a landscape that was both imposing and monotonous. Here, the river was not even three hundred meters wide and its winding course was bordered by rocky walls which were overtowered by the bizarre serrations of the mountains behind them. Some ten meters below us, the waters which were already muddy and always fast-flowing, bathed the foot of the staircase leading to the balcony and caused the light boat which was waiting for us to hit the rocks. It was an admirable place to see the pirogue races, so frequently held in Laos, or to enjoy the illuminations with which the locals often enhanced the splendor of their tropical nights. Some distance from there, the calm, black waters of the Nam Hou mixed with the yellowish waters of the Mekong river and the demarcation line that separated them wavered about the mouth of the river, following the variable relation between the speeds of the two currents. Opposite us, on the left, the golden color of a sand bank cut brightly into the dark color of the neighboring rocks, behind which the sun had already disappeared and the tops of which rose up, black, against a red sky.



**Plate 1** *A carriage of the Lord Buddha in a cave (drawing by E. Théron).*

After having enjoyed this spectacle for a moment, we entered the cave. Buddhas of all sizes were stacked up in every nook and cranny; flowers, banners, umbrellas, all kinds of votive objects decorated the altars. The flickering of the torches which gave us light caused great shadows to dance in the depths of this natural temple and made the figure of the prophet of Kapilavaston, normally so calm, look grotesque. Despite the originality of this religious decoration, I asked myself if it detracted from the natural grandeur of the cave and whether the sparkling of stalactites would not have been preferable to the faded gilding and the humidity-stained colors of these Buddhist trinkets. It was especially travelers and the oarsmen of the river who were the pious devotees of this cave. The priests who served it lived on the opposite bank in the village of Pak Hou and never lacked flowers or offerings. During the high waters, the river rose to the entrance of the cave itself. In 1856, an exceptional rise had partly flooded it and the inhabitants had indicated the height to which the water had risen, with a red line drawn a bit further up the plain colored, vertical wall of the rock. This line indicated a difference of 17.5 meters between the lowest levels and the level of the inundation of that record year. The usual difference, resulting from taking the average of several normal years, was only 10.7 meters.

The houses of the village of Pak Hou were scattered along the left side, behind the sand bank I have mentioned, which formed a sort of creek or natural harbor where our pirogues were already moored for the night. From all points of view, this station was exceptionally comfortable: instead of our narrow pirogues, huts built on the sand, for the use of travelers, served as our bedrooms.

Night was already falling: I hastened to go up-river in a light boat to make a few soundings; conducted by two oarsmen, I ascended a mile or two on the course of the Nam Hou. The current was almost zero, the waters were as clear and silent as the waters of the Mekong river were murky and turbulent. Gliding along the rocky wall which formed a vertical bank more than 350 meters high on the right side, my boat produced a light chopping sound, the silver-toned noise of which resounded like an echo in the nocturnal atmosphere. At an enormous height above my head some belated birds of prey were circling to enter their nests placed beyond reach in the crevices of the rocks. Their raucous, discordant cries became fewer and fewer. I asked the oarsmen to stop rowing to enjoy the pleasure of this moment of calm and freshness brought by the first stars which is so pleasant in the hot countries. Soon, nothing more was heard but the mute and languorous

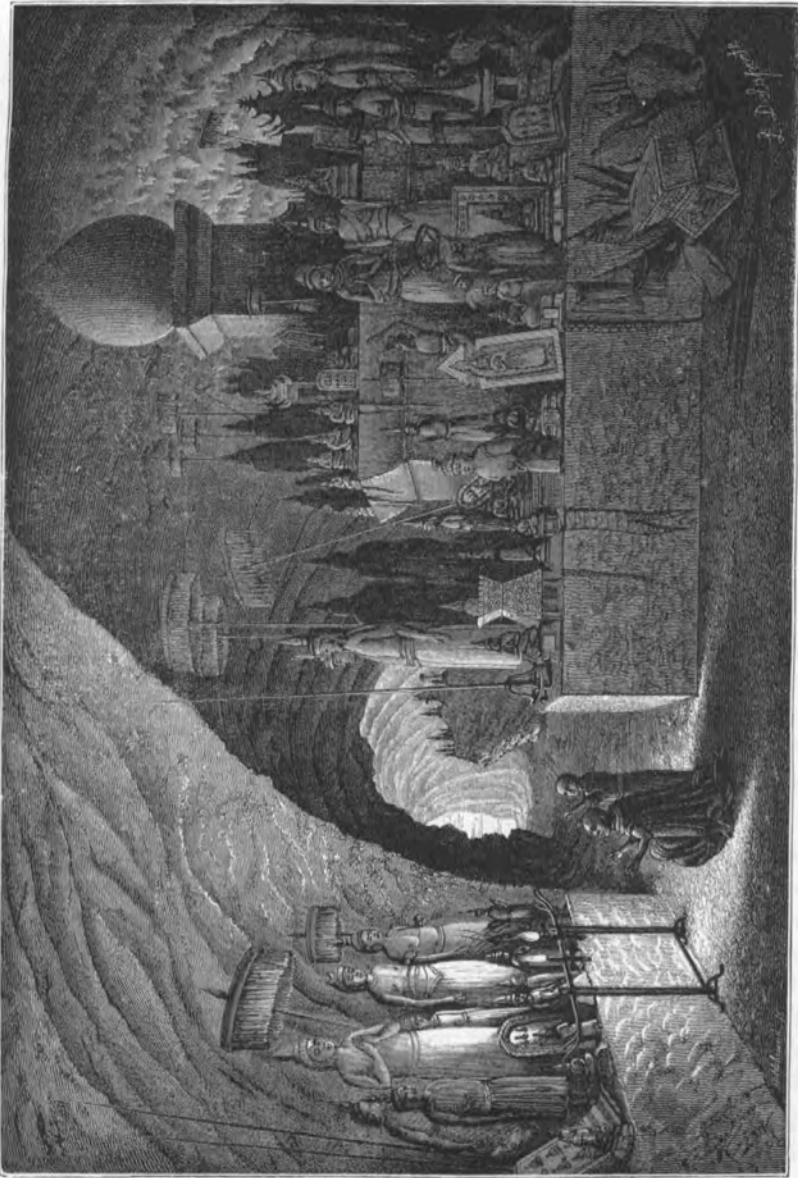
## Further Travels in Laos and in Yunnan

murmuring of the great river and the soft song of the nocturnal insects, telling the bushes of the river banks of their mysterious loves.

*A source of the Menam—Pakben—A boat in distress—  
Pak Ta—Xieng Khong—The volcanoes of Ban Tanoun—  
The first serious difficulties—The natives of Lamet—  
Departure from Xieng Khong—The ruins of Xieng Hai  
and Xieng Sen—Historical souvenirs—Arrival at the  
rapids of Tang Ho—A corner of the earthly paradise—  
The route of the river to Muong Lim*

After a frenetic and tiring day, passed amid feverish intellectual activity that was exhausting because of the incessant work demanding my attention every single minute, it was pleasant to get a moment of rest at the end and to contemplate at ease one of these scenes to which I could not give a moment during the day! What a dull task to be a geographer and what a monotonous occupation the compass and the watch are! How much I envied those of my colleagues whose activities did not deprive them of, at least, the attractions of the journey and the pleasures of seeing new landscapes unfold before their eyes, without any other concern than to admire them! Alas! the more the landscapes varied, the less free time I had. There a mountain, quickly a measurement; a river, what was its name and where did it come from? A village, let us place it on the map! Rapids, where was the channel and which was the greatest depth of the water? I was not allowed a minute's peace. These continuous gymnastics, this everlasting geographical preoccupation which was my lot for two years, have so estranged me from what I call the picturesque enjoyments of the journey that I gladly refer to them now to enjoy them entirely at my ease.<sup>1</sup>

The night had become very black; my Laotians who were squatting motionless and silent at the ends of the boat, roused me from my dreams. The current of the Nam Hou was taking us gradually to the Mekong river; we had to return to the camp, the glimmer of which lit the river a short distance away.



**Plate 2** *The sanctuary of the Pak Hou cave (a view taken from the back of the cave) (drawing by L. Delaporte, from life).*

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The next day, the navigation of the river was difficult. After flowing north-east since Luang Prabang, the river gradually tended to the absolutely opposite direction, while it surged between rocks and mountains that became steeper and steeper. Once established in this new direction, its bed cleaned out without widening. The mountains stretched parallel to the banks and formed several levels with regular steps. The vegetation, which was more uniform, completely lost its tropical appearance, apart from the numerous wild banana trees which mingled with bombax trees on the banks of the river and the few gigantic palm trees which rose here and there on the tops of the calcareous rocks. Pine trees crowned the highest pinnacles and they reminded us of our distant homeland.

The villages were few and far between on our route. Some were inhabited by Laotians who had fled from the principalities in the north, including, among others, Muong Kun or Xieng Tong. But the natives were more numerous here than the Laotians. They almost all belonged to the Khmou tribe. We could see their villages stretching on the mountains at the second level and the light columns of smoke rising above the tops or drifting along the ravines between them indicated places of forestry exploitation or where fires prepared the ground for seasonal sowing.

On 27 May we changed boats and crews at Ban Cokhe. The next day, we arrived at Ban Tanoun, a village situated on the right bank of the river, not far from which they had indicated to Commander de Lagréc the existence of active volcanoes. Doctor Joubert, our geologist, was dispatched from the expedition to examine the place closely. Mr. de Carné went with him. These gentlemen were to join us again in Xieng Khong.

On 29 May we passed the mouth of a small river, the Se Ngum, of little interest in itself but important to mention, because from the opposite flank of the mountain range which gave rise to it, the eastern-most branch of the Menam descended. The sources of the two watercourses were separated by a very small space and according to the information of the locals, it would be possible, at the time of the high waters, to drag a boat for one or two miles over fairly smooth terrain to leave the basin of the Mekong and begin to navigate in that of the Menam. Is it this proximity that has given rise to the assumption on our old maps that these two rivers were connected?'

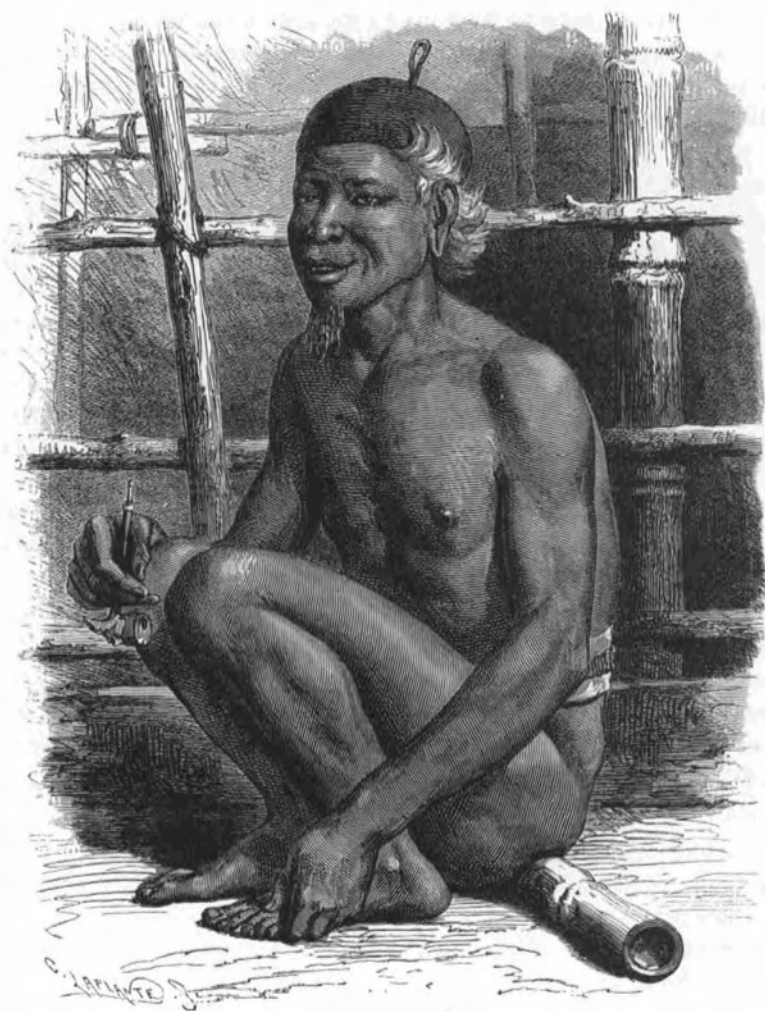
We stopped twenty-four hours in the village of Pakhen, which was our second stopover place between Luang Prabang and Xieng Khong. A pretty little river

coming from the north, which, not far from its mouth, is transformed into a torrent rich in fish, joined the Mekong on the eastern side of the village which was for the most part inhabited by natives. The chief of the place himself belonged to this race and was very concerned and hospitable to us. The rise of the water was about three meters in this area.

On 31 May we left Pakben and the river, the general direction of which continued to be west some degrees south, flowing between high rocky cliffs, crowned with vegetation and extremely picturesque in appearance. We had to stop beside a sand bank in the evening. In the middle of the night, I was woken up by the Annamite guard, who informed me that the boat of the lower-ranking Laotian chief who was accompanying us had detached itself and had been taken away by the current. Its owner was sleeping in it. Our oarsmen, woken up with a start, were in the greatest anxiety: some hastily boarded another pirogue to try to reach the unfortunate before he should be thrown into the water by the current amid the rocks. Would they arrive in time to avoid a catastrophe? Three or four miles down river from us there were rapids which were like most of those that we met in this part of the river, formed by the banks of pebbles that accumulated at the mouths of the torrents that descended from the mountains. The pirogue of the sleeping chief would certainly have keeled over in the currents and the unfortunate man drowned in the water before he had time to realize where he was, if those who were pursuing him had not managed to reach him.

They forcefully pulled on the oars: this contest in the middle of the night between fate which took the unsuspecting sleeper with her and providence which aroused the saviors was indeed gripping. We shivered at the thought that amid the muffled noise which came to us from the rapids, we might perhaps distinguish the first cry, the last of a man suddenly woken up amid the waves.

It was a long time since the noise of the rescue boats' oars had ceased to be heard. The wait continued until daylight and it was only at the stopover for lunch that we saw the two boats coming back, with all those they contained. The chief had woken up at the cries of his pursuers, who were still very far away from him when his pirogue was not more than a hundred meters from the rapids. With great presence of mind, which was not surprising for a people who were familiar with this sort of danger, he immediately realized his position, grabbed a paddle and with a few vigorous strokes had left the line of the current and reached the closest bank. The small pirogue was then taken back by the crew of the boat, very



**Plate 3** *The chief of the natives of Pakben (drawing by Janet-Lange, based on a sketch done by L. Delaporte)*

happy with their successful pursuit. I may be very much mistaken, but I believe our low-ranking chief had a statue of the Buddha made which will increase the number of votive objects deposited in the cave of Pak Hou.

On 1 June 1867 we had to traverse rapids, Keng Le, which made it necessary to unload our boats: it was the first difficulty of this magnitude since our departure from Luang Prabang. With this obstacle passed, the navigation became very easy, the banks were less rocky and more distinct. In the west we observed the tops of a mountain range averaging one thousand to one thousand two hundred meters in height; it seemed to run due north to south. This barrier would terminate the long detour to the west that the Mekong had been describing since Luang Prabang and turned it back northwards. The curves disappeared, the bed widened, the current diminished and the gentle, regular slopes that lead from the right bank to the summits of the range were covered with settlements and crops.

On 2 June, we stopped for some time at Ban Hatsa, a pretty village situated on the left bank. The next day, we arrived at Pak Ta, the last stretch of our trip before Xieng Khong.

As its name indicated, Pak Ta (the mouth of the Ta) was situated at the confluence of the Nam Ta and the big river. It was a considerable village. While they were preparing the new boats for us, which this time would leave us only after we reached Xieng Khong, we visited pagodas. In one of them there was a very well-made clock of such refined workmanship as could only be found in Europe. This was evidently not a local product and the Chinese script which encircled its base made us place its origin in either Tong King or Yunnan. I would gladly be inclined to the first of these two countries, since the name of the emperor engraved in the manufacturing date did not refer to any of the Chinese sovereigns of the last two centuries, whose names I had quite well in my memory at that time.

A little above Pak Ta, the river turned to the south-west, beyond the range, the eastern flank of which it had so far paralleled. This passage was marked by new navigational difficulties. At that point we crossed the borders of the territory of Luang Prabang and entered the great province of Muong Nan of which Xieng Khong is the second city.

After this passage, the river expanded into a great plain such as we had not met with since Vienchan and it took up its course to the north-west again. On 4 June

at night we camped on a sand bank. Our horizon immediately widened, allowing us a view to the west and north of the distant bluish summits of great ranges, the last spurs of which came down in gentle rises to the banks of the river.

The next day, at eight a.m., we went on foot to Xicng Khong, where they had quickly finished the four huts they were building for our reception. The welcome of the authorities was showed good will and eagerness and the governor of the city, who was the second in command of the province of Muong Nan, came the same evening to pay a visit to Commander de Lagrée. Our boats were unloaded and they returned to Pak Ta, after the crew received the customary remuneration. Now, we found ourselves outside the sphere of influence and action of the king of Luang Prabang.



**Plate 4** *A bell found in the pagoda of Pak Ta (drawing by Mr. Rapine)*

this area, the soil resounded under our feet as if there existed a deep cavity under it. Applying one's ear to the ground, one can perceive a mute very far-off noise, which, according to the natives, often came close to being perceptible from a distance. This crevice seemed to run southwards and one could follow the route

Mr. Joubert and Mr. de Carné joined us again: the volcanic phenomena that our geologist had been able to observe were, as usual, much less important than the stories of the locals had purported. A sunken and cracked terrain, from which sulfuric and carbonic gases and steam escaped, replaced the erupting crater which had been claimed. The traces of volcanic action existed in two different places, called Phou Fay Niai and Phou Fay Noi, "mountain of the big fire" and "mountain of the small fire", by the natives. The cracks moved slowly, marking their passage by destroying the vegetation, by the charred trunks of big trees and by deposits of crystallized sulfur. Today Phou Fay Niai occupied a surface seven to eight hundred meters long and three hundred meters wide. On

that it had already covered over several kilometers. The local people collected the sulfur that was deposited on the walls of the crevice. Mr. Joubert was unable to see any centers of eruption. The purported volcano was thus reduced to simple smoking pits.

The negotiations with the governor of the small city started on the day after our arrival in Xieng Khong. I believe that I have already said that he was the second in command of the big province of Muong Nan. Despite his natural good will and his desire to please, he was unable to decide to let us cross the border of Siam: the letters from Bangkok which we carried accorded us free circulation on the whole of Siamese territory but they did not indicate that we could leave it. Taking on himself to authorize us to do so was a responsibility that terrified the timid official. Placed at an advanced post which was always dangerous, he was accustomed to circumspection, which was moreover justified by the numerous wars of which this part of Laos, being disputed time and again between Siam and Bangkok [*sic*], had been the theater. He wanted to conduct us to Muong Nan or, at least, to persuade us to await the answer from the governor of the province to our request to leave Siamese territory. If need be, all that he was able to agree to was to have us conducted to Xieng Hai, another small province subject to Bangkok and situated a little closer to Burmese territory. Nevertheless, Mr. de Lagrée had no problem in showing him that by the terms of our passports themselves we had the right to proceed at least to the border. Consequently, he took it upon himself to furnish us with boats to ascend the river to the point where it entered the Burmese possessions. This course was evidently authorized by our passports which specified *free circulation on the whole* of the Siamese territory. The governor of Xieng Khong objected: "But, the point where I would thus lead you is in mid forest. You will not find supplies, nor means of transportation there to proceed further. Moreover, at that point the river is no longer navigable and you would have to travel overland." Mr. de Lagrée replied: "That is of little importance and not your affair; but mine."

The reader probably remembers that we left without passports of the court of Ava. Admiral de La Grandière had tried to obtain them by the intermediary of Mgr. Bigandet, the French Catholic bishop, who enjoyed a certain influence with the sovereign of Burma. But, in the meantime, a palace revolution had removed the latter from his throne. The three younger brothers of the reigning prince had murdered their two older brothers, without, however, being able to seize power.

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They had sought refuge with the English, who had pushed them back, and then with the Karen. The troubles which followed this assassination made it impossible for the Burmese government to answer the communications about us which had been sent.

Nevertheless, Mr. de Lagrée could avail himself of this process to affirm to the Burmese authorities that the court of Ava had been informed of our journey. He wrote a letter to this effect to the king of Xieng Tong, the Laotian prince who ruled the territory that bordered immediately on Xieng Khong and to whom a Burmese agent was attached. He asked him for passage and the authorization to procure the necessary means of transportation in these states and he assured him of our friendly disposition and of the entirely pacific and scientific objective of our mission.

A special mail left on 10 June to convey this message and the gifts which accompanied it. The latter, all destined for the king of Xieng Tong, comprised a small carpet, a fan, a piece of Algerian cloth and a few small objects, pipes, soap, handkerchiefs, etc. If we had known about the frequent trade relations which existed between the Shan States of Burma and the English colonies, we would probably not have dared to offer objects which gave only a very poor idea of our resources. But we were used to seeing the smallest European goods evoke the most lively admiration and the most ardent envy among the Laotians of the south and that had increased the value of our barter objects in our own eyes. Moreover, the aim was to cozen the king of Xieng Tong more than to perform an act of deference to him.

Nevertheless, the authorities of Xieng Khong decided to gather the necessary boats. It was not without trouble and going to great lengths [that this was done]: the commercial traffic on the river here was almost nil and the means of navigation were very restricted. The big pirogues were now extremely rare and skilled oarsmen could not be found. Because of these obstacles, our departure was held back until 14 June. We used the time to visit Xieng Khong and its surroundings.

The village of Xieng Khong was surrounded by a moat and by a strong palisade. A small brook divided it into two parts and the banks were connected by a bamboo bridge, more picturesque than solid. The forest which surrounded the village was traversed by paths that were larger than usual: they were almost roads. Nevertheless the light Laotian carriages of the south were not in evidence here.

Some elephants, pulling heavy logs of teak wood, began here to make their appearance, passing, with a heavy nonchalant trot, convoys of pack bullocks coming and going. One of these paths ran south-east. It was the route to Xieng Mai, a city which was said to be twelve days march away.

In this region, the word *Xieng* replaced *Muong*, used in the south to designate the capital of a province. Here they said "going to the *Xieng*" as [further south] they said "going to the *Muong*".

The trade overland was barely ever more active than the commerce on the river and was reduced to commodities of prime necessity, such as salt, which became rarer and rarer here and which they got from the south of Laos and from Nongkay.

The look of the countryside was rather sad and the population sparse. [The Laotians] had mixed with the natives in considerable proportions so as in the end to lose their Laotian features completely. The crew-cut hair which was worn on top of the head, in the Siamese fashion, disappeared completely. The inhabitants, Laotians or of the native race, wore their hair long. They tied it upwards in a bun at the side of the head and they adopted the Burmese fashion of the turban. The women often placed a silver plate at the knot in their hairdo. They were no longer dressed as in the south. Their skin was lighter and their faces took on a more oriental shape and a more refined expression.

The customs of the natives were imprinted with great harshness. Copper was their greatest ornament: long, double pins of copper fastened their hair on their heads, rings of copper encircled the neck, copper wire twisted into spirals served as belts and copper pins with big heads filled the enormous holes which these natives made in their earlobes. Sometimes also these new types of pendants were replaced by simple rolls of cotton, which were held in the greatest esteem by their owners. Some measured from two to three centimeters in diameter and the earlobe barely encircled this singular ornament with a minuscule strip of flesh. The men continued to display very great simplicity in dress. The women, on the contrary, were elaborately dressed and, unlike the Laotian women, they never displayed their naked breasts to curious onlookers, which often conveyed sadness rather than charm. They wore a skirt of blue cotton with white embroidery and a small blue jacket, worn tightly against the skin. Their behavior was more timid, more modest; most of them would be gracious if not pretty, if the hard

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work they shared with their husbands did not harden their features and bend their backs from a very young age. Most of them carried their children on their backs in a sort of cloth belt to keep their hands free and in order not to interrupt their occupations except when they had to breast-feed them. It was not unusual to see Laotians married to native women and in these cases the women hold ranks equal to their Laotian companions.

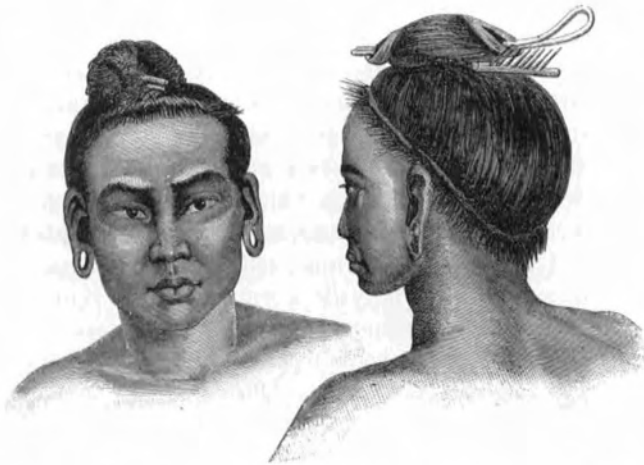
The natives of Xieng Tong belonged to the great tribe of the Lanet which inhabited, in particular, the valley of the Nam Ta, on the left bank of the Mckong, the greater part of which accepted the authority of Luang Prabang.

The small amount of deforestation that was practiced in the surroundings of Xieng Khong was made worse by the intermittent rains and hot weather which characterized the rainy season: the sun which was then at its zenith fiercely burned the soil. Two of us, Mr. Thorel and I, were affected by fever attacks, accompanied by vomiting and delirium and we were hardly recovered when we had to leave again.

However, it was with great satisfaction that we went back on the road. The journey was beginning to take on an unexpected character and an apparent danger, which it had lacked so far. The smooth passage that we had secured with the Siamese passports was coming to an end. We were going to be left to our own devices, to the resources of our own diplomacy. Moreover, the part of the river that we were traversing was once more entirely lacking in European vestiges. Mr. Duyshart's sketch had indicated to us the general direction and the principal obstacles in the course of the river from Luang Prabang to Xieng Khong. From this latter point, nothing detracted from the pleasure of discovery and the emotion of surprise.

We had some difficulty in procuring sufficient supplies for the period of time that we were going to spend without the means of stocking up supplies other than by hunting. They warned us, in effect, that the banks of the Mekong would become entirely deserted again up to the point where we would stop to await the means of transportation requested from the king of Xieng Tong. Nevertheless, at the last moment, thanks to the intervention of the government, supplies arrived in abundance but at quite a high price. Thus we paid sixteen francs for a hundred kilograms of rice; the same price for a pig which barely weighed sixty kilograms and chickens, about thirty in number, at seven and a half centimes apiece.

On 14 June, at 1 p.m., we left Xieng Khong in six boats: it was the last time that we would use this means of transportation in the exploration of the Mekong river. Luckily for our inexperienced oarsmen, the navigation of the river was easy at first. Here and there some isolated rocks still appeared in its bed. They soon disappeared. The current weakened: one felt that the general tilt of the land had become very gentle. Beautiful forests rose on the banks, which became ever flatter.



**Plate 5** *Natives from the vicinity of Xieng Khong (drawing by Janet-Lange, based on a sketch done by L. Delaporte).*

The river, which in Xieng Khong seemed to come from the north-west, suddenly turned to the west here and in this direction there was a limitless plain ahead, the horizon of which barely showed glimpses of light and distant undulations. It was the first time since Vienchan that we had enjoyed such an extensive view and that the river had run peacefully and full to its edges in a wide and shallow bed. Nowhere yet had there been such a beautiful appearance of navigability. Unfortunately this would be a very brief truce with the river's wildness.

From this point on the river describes a long and lazy detour to the south. You could say it is happy to linger in this plain and to rest its waters here from the tiring course through mountains and rocks.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of this detour it received the waters of the Nam Kok. This river, which was very wide, was fed by a chain which separated the valley of the Salween from that of the Mekong river, a chain which the Burmese call Tanen-Toung-Gyi. On the banks of this river stood the city of Xieng Hai, also called Xieng Rai in some accounts, and the ruins of which MacLeod visited in 1837. This provincial capital, formerly very important and the capital of one of those many kingdoms which then divided Indo-China and had prepared their subordination to Siam and Burma by relentless internecine wars, had recently been reconstructed close to the ruins of the old city. It was at this time the residence of the Siamese governor. According to one tradition, Xieng Hai was formerly called Tsen-Katsa-Lakon. From his birth, the king who changed this name to Xieng Hai gave unequivocal signs of his future power: he broke all the cradles in which he was placed and they had to give him one made of iron. They claimed that this metal cradle still existed amid the ruins of the old palace. This prince extended his domination over a great distance and gave his son in appanage the city of Xieng Mai, which was called Muong Lamien before this time, and to his wife he gave the city of Xieng Tong or Kema-Tunka.<sup>4</sup> The valleys watered by the Nam Kok and its numerous affluents, being separated only by light undulations, formed an admirable zone of fertility and richness that was well disposed to become the center of a powerful kingdom. At a very short distance to the north of the mouth of this river, we would come upon other ruins and other historical traditions which testified to the fact that the same place had often tempted the waves of immigrants who arrived from Central Asia through the mountain passes of the north of Indo-China and tried to spread into the lower valleys of the great rivers of the peninsula.

Today, this beautiful region, which separated the principality of Xieng Tong from that of Xieng Mai, was almost entirely uninhabited: coveted by Siamese and Burmese and the battlefield of these two peoples, neither of them had so far been powerful enough to assure its exclusive possession and it had remained a sort of neutral terrain until today, abandoned to the forest and its natural denizens, less turbulent and wiser proprietors than man. For some years, the Siamese, or at least the Laotians who accepted their authority, had timidly reoccupied the right bank of the Nam Kok. Perhaps this did not last very long.

Xieng Sen, the ruins of which extended on the banks of the Mekong itself to three or four miles from its confluence with the Nam Kok, was one of the first

cities whose name appeared in the Laotian and Siamese chronicles. One of the most famous Laotian kings, Thama-Trai-Pidok, reigned in Xieng Sen shortly after the time when Phra Ruang, the so-called founder of the Siamese era, constructed the city of Sang-Khalok on the eastern branch of the Menam and threw off the yoke of Cambodia. The son of Phra Ruang, Phaya Soucharat, had cannons cast and fortified his capital. This was wise because the king of Xieng Sen attacked him and, despite the help which the king of Xieng Mai, Phromavadi, lent to his cousin Phaya Soucharat, the latter was obliged to submit to his enemy and to give away his daughter in marriage. Thama-Trai-Pidok extended his domination over the whole kingdom of Phra Ruang, founded the city of Phitsanoulouk, to the south of Sang-Khalok and, advancing even further, established one of his sons as king of Lopburi, a small distance away from where Ayuthia would later arise. One of his other sons became king in Xieng Hai and succeeded him on the throne of Xieng Sen. From this time on a series of wars started between the Siamese and the Laotians; these lasted seven generations.

It was difficult to attach a date, even an approximate one, to all these events which one can only see as episodes in the long and sustained struggle by the Thai Noi or "small Thais", the junior branch of the Laotian race, to arrive at independence. Phra Ruang was born, according to some, in the year 950 of the Buddhist era, but, according to others, in 1500. The latter attribute to him the foundation of the era which was still in use in Laos, in Burma and in Siam, and which began in 638 A.D.; in this struggle sustained by his son against the king of Xieng Sen, others had the famous Buddhist apostle Buddhaghosa, who according to Singhalese chronicles lived in the first half of the fifth century, intervene. All that one could confirm, amid so many contradictions, was that the princes whose names we have cited had existed and that we were not dealing here with purely legendary personalities as was the case in other tales.

We stopped an hour or two close to the ruins of Xieng Sen. The destruction of this city went back more than half a century. A period of wars followed the rebellion of Xieng Mai against Burma. This latter principality rose up in 1774 against the successor of Alomprah and invoked the protection of Bangkok, which had replaced Ayuthia as the capital of Siam. The reader probably remembers that Ayuthia, founded by Phaya Uthong in 1350, had been destroyed by the Burmese in 1767. It was as a result of this rebellion that the Laotian states of the upper valley of the Menam, Xieng Mai, Lakon, Laphon, Muong Nan and Muong Phe passed under the domination of Siam.

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Nothing could be seen above the tall grass which had invaded the site of the old metropolis of northern Laos except the spire of a *that*, almost as big as the one that we had visited in Vienchan. Some partly overgrown paths led away from the bank and entered the brush. We came upon some piles of bricks, some overturned Buddha statues; farther away there was a well-leveled space preserved from the encroaching vegetation by brick or concrete tiling. Elsewhere there were some columns of hardwood, on which traces of gilding were still visible. The flowering tops of some fruit trees that had gone wild again rose above the high grasses and indicated the position of the gardens in the former city.

It was terribly hot during this visit to the scattered ruins. The grasses formed a sort of moving hedge which hid the view on both sides of the road and from which came the hot and unhealthy odor that emanates from the jungles in the middle of the day. A short distance away the tops of the teak forests, which covered the plain, limited the horizon in the west. Instinctively, we went that way to search for clearer terrain, more freshness and more shade, when suddenly the leaves of a great mango tree beside us shook violently. At that time, it was almost windless and this intermittent movement surely had another cause than a sudden gust of wind. We soon discovered what it was: a rhinoceros pushing itself strongly against the trunk of the tree and managing to set up an oscillating movement at the top of the tree, which made the ripe fruit rain down all around the enormous animal. Our arrival stopped it from eating the meal that it had so laboriously gained. As soon as it saw us, it fled across the jungle and created a large passage through the grasses. We listened a while to the sound of its quick, heavy footsteps gradually disappearing in the depths of the forest and none of us thought about pursuing the timid and inoffensive pachyderm.

We set off again at two p.m.. The river, which had turned northward again, soon re-entered the mountainous zone from which it had emerged a while ago. The next day, the navigation became as difficult as during the worst days of our navigation between Vienchan and Xieng Cang. The country was absolutely deserted. On 17 June in the evening we camped on the edges of a torrent close to which some people from Xieng Mai, returning from an expedition in the neighboring forests, had set up their camp. They were occupied with shaping the wax that they had collected into cakes. The honeycombs were melted above a fire, subjected to strong pressure and the liquid wax, freed from all impurities, ran into a mold in the shape of a segment of a sphere. We bought two of these

cakes to make candles and we paid for them at the rate of one *tical* or three francs per pound.

On 18 June, we arrived at the foot of rapids called Tang Ho, which offered an insurmountable obstacle to navigation on the river during this season. A *sala* had been constructed on the right bank which belonged to Xieng Tong and which consequently was Burmese territory. The left bank was still Siamese for a very large distance up stream. We had arrived at the extreme edge of the country in which our passports assured us free circulation. From this moment on, the fate of our journey depended on unknown circumstances. The reply to the letter which had been sent to the king of Xieng Tong would not reach us for a week or two. Mr. de Lagrée sent a letter to the governor of Muong Lim, a province of Xieng Tong, and from whose capital we were now a short distance away, to inform him of the request that he had sent to his sovereign and to request from him the means of transportation necessary to go up to Muong Lim, there to wait for the decision that would be taken about us.

In the meantime we installed ourselves in the *sala* beside the Burmese and Laotian travelers who were there already; a certain commercial activity was noticeable at this point and the pack-saddle bullock caravans which made their stopover there had left numerous traces in the vicinity. Two principal currents of exchange met there: one, which took place in boats, brought the necessary salt for local consumption from Luang Prabang; the other, which followed the overland route, brought balls of gambier [from *Uncaria gambir*; Tran. note] and areca nuts which were part of the composition of the chewing betel of the Laotians of the north. The trees which provided these two products became much rarer or even vanished completely in this region. It was known that gambier was an astringent substance extracted from the leaves of a tree of the Rubiaceae family. It had been used for a few years in Europe for dyeing and tanning and the export of this commodity from the single port of Singapore to the West reached more than twenty million kilograms per year. For a long time the Chinese have used this substance to dye silk and cotton cloths black and brown. Gambier was an object of prime necessity for the Malays who chewed it alone or in combination with betel leaves.

From the chief of Muong Lim, we could fear a bland refusal to permit us entry to his territory. Thus, it was safer to keep the boats and the oarsmen which had brought us from Xieng Khong until his answer reached us. In the meantime, I

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resolved to ascend the right bank of the river as far as possible on foot. We would leave the banks of the Mekong to walk overland. We ignored the question of where and when it would be possible to return to the noble river. For my part, I attached a special importance to continuing to follow its winding and bizarre course. Since we had entered the region that had been left untouched by European investigations, each of the meanders of the Mekong that I was able to add to my map was an important geographical discovery. A constant preoccupation, from which nothing could distract me, ended by imposing itself like an obsession. Thus, I had an obsession for the Mekong, as Dr. Thorel had one for new species of plants and Dr. Joubert one for graywacke or for anthracitous stones. I was not aware of how little distance I would cover in a single day on uncleared terrain amid the rocks or bushes clustered on the banks of the river, and how little space they would occupy on my definitive map. I did not apply any mapping scale to this grand area of nature, the unknown sites of which unfolded before me. Each step became more of a conquest over my enemy: the unknown.<sup>5</sup> Thus on 19 June, very early in the morning, I left with my compass in my hand and a small packet of supplies on my back. The sky was almost overcast and promised to save me from the burning reflections of the sun on the rocky beaches of the Mekong. I traversed the barrier of rocks, amid which the waters of the Tang Ho rapids roared. A single winding passage, some thirty meters wide, opened in this belt of stones. No raft could descend the current without crashing; no boat was able to ascend it without filling with water, even if pulled by ropes. But at high water, when the river completely filled the moat, which was about six hundred meters wide and extended between the two mountainous chains of hills forming the banks, this obstacle could be traversed and traffic by pirogue became again possible.

Continuing my journey, I noticed that the river tended more and more to the north-east and finally it seemed to direct itself towards the borders of China,<sup>6</sup> that promised land, at the gates of which we had to wander for four long months before we were able to enter it.

The river, which was reduced to a channel fifty to eighty meters wide, left great sand banks uncovered, interspersed with basins containing stagnant hot water and bizarrely shaped rocks which were difficult to climb. Everywhere, the forest clearly marked the [limit of the area prone to flooding] and framed this blue expanse with a green ribbon of shimmering reflections, speckled all over with

black and white spots. At the start of my excursion, I was able to walk on sandy beaches along the verge of the great trees without being obliged either to enter the undergrowth, where walking would have been too difficult, or to walk in the water, which would sometimes have been too deep. The landscape displayed a wildness full of grandeur. There were no traces of human habitation anywhere: the fleeting traces of fishers or nomadic hunters which till now we were accustomed to meeting, even in the most deserted places, were entirely lacking here. This caused a strange impression of wondering and novelty. My shadow, which the rising sun sometimes lengthened on the sand banks or depicted against the rock walls, appeared to me to violate the virginity of this nature which was able to escape the profanations of man. The noise of my steps appeared as dissonant in the great harmony of the forest and the river. Sometimes I tried to speak out loud to affirm my right to enjoy one or the other and to expel the fascination which this calm, grand solitude exerted over me and the silence that answered me made me ashamed for uttering such a vain noise. The disc of the sun had already appeared above the line of trees which crowned the tops of the hills. Slowly nature woke up under the canopy of the forest. Birds celebrated with joyous chants the shafts of light suddenly penetrating their shadowy hideouts. The deer bellowed and elephants made their trumpeting cry heard. Like the start of nature at dawn, a light puff of wind rippled the surface of the water and shook the tops of the big trees. I tried to sort out all the notes of this vague and melodious concert with an attentive ear and I watched the sky, the waters and the forest with a delighted eye. They were still enveloped by a transparent haze which the rays of the sun coloured pink before dissipating it altogether. Suddenly, going round a rock which barred the path, I saw a young deer drinking, ten steps away from me. I stopped and instinctively I searched on my shoulders for my rifle which was luckily absent. What would I have done with this kind of game and how would I have carried it to the camp? Thus I stood still, watching the gracious animal savor the limpid water with long gulps, sometimes stopping to contemplate its rippling reflection which the barely troubled waters sent back. After a while it raised its head, took a few steps on the bank, saw me and—I beg the reader to believe me—it came to me. It pricked up its ears and its fixed eyes testified to an unutterable astonishment, which showed no signs of diffidence or fear. In my turn, I had a strange feeling and I held my breath to prolong as long as possible this intimate meeting with a creature of the forest. It came to me like a creature out of Eden or the enchanted gardens of Armide, in which, however, I have never

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taken a stroll. The singular trust of this animal which confirmed to me that man was absolutely unknown in these areas, charmed me and intimidated me at the same time. The deer stopped a pace away from me and the instinct of the hunter suddenly rising up, the idea came to me to grab it by its horns. As fast as my movement was, the agile beast shied away and disappeared in the blink of an eye into the forest, leaving me with the regret of having shortened by my impatience this fairy-tale meeting which lacked only a conversation to make it like a fable out of La Fontaine.<sup>7</sup>

A little further on, I had to engage in the toughest gymnastics to pass a sort of promontory which jutted out into the bed of the river. It formed an absolutely vertical wall which the water bathed with a current too strong for me to think about swimming round it. Dense vegetation covered the top of the rock and after having climbed the slippery slopes, I still had to force a difficult passage through the lianas and the thorny brambles. Fortunately, on the other side, a beautiful sandy beach was located between the forest and the river and promised an easy walk for a while. I stopped a while to rest from the efforts that I had just made. The calm, shallow water which lapped the bank with a gentle wave invited to the pleasures of a bathe and I let myself be seduced by its promises. I had barely swum a few strokes in the open water when two elephants came out of the forest and in their turn headed for the river. When they saw me, one of them stopped and turned round and went back. Despite the good opinion that I have of the character of these animals, I would have liked the other to follow his companion. But he did not do so, and after a moment of hesitation, the latter entered the water, stretching out his trunk to me and sniffing noisily. I did not know what to do: going back to the bank where the forest and the rocks barred my way on two sides out of three was perhaps more dangerous still than staying in the water. Thus I remained, making myself as small as possible and carefully watching the movements of the proboscidean, ready to brace myself against the current, risking being carried down, quite far from my clothes and my notes, if the animal looked like getting too close. He was colored a magnificent brown. His great height and the size of his tusks proved that he had long since reached the end of his growth. He waded into the water up to his belly and began to spray his back with his trunk. We were some twenty meters away from each other and he constantly held his little gray eyes fixed on me, stretching his trunk in my direction from time to time. But soon he appeared to be having so much fun pouring water over his body

that he seemed not to make much of my presence. Little-by-little, I approached the bank where my things were drying in the sun. I threw them over my shoulders and quickly continued my walk, sometimes throwing a furtive glance back to my bathing companion. The latter did not even bother to turn to see which direction I took and for a long time I could see the jets of water that he launched into the air falling like rain sparkling in the rays of the sun.

By noon, the bank of the river had definitely become a high vertical wall, covered as always with tangled vegetation. I had been marching for six hours. I was overcome with fatigue, the sand and the rocks had warmed up in the rays of the sun, despite the numerous clouds that softened its power. My naked feet were swollen and bleeding. My love of geography yielded to hunger. I took a last observation of the river, selected a shady place on the river bank and opened the packet of provisions the cook had given me when I left: rice, instead of bread, and a roast chicken were the contents. The water of the river was not far. I had a meal that gave me—with my appetite sharpened by a long march—more pleasure than the most mouth-watering feast in the civilized world. At one o'clock, I retraced my steps. It was siesta time. The wind had fallen and the heat had become suffocating. The banks of the river, busy since morning with the animals that came to quench their thirst when they woke up, were deserted again. The forest was silent. The wild inhabitants retired into the deepest of these fresh retreats. I was alone to brave the heat of the day and I mechanically followed the traces of my feet imprinted in the sand and mixed with the imprints of deer of all kinds, wild boar and elephant. I would have liked to wipe away this double furrow left by my passage, which appeared to stain this beautiful place. This solitary landscape of the Mekong, one of the last that I was to see, has remained deeply engraved in my memory.

It was night when I returned to the camp. The story that I told about my day to the hunters in the Commission made their mouths water. I agreed to conduct them to this El Dorado where deer could be taken with bare hands, the next day. It was not without remorse that I betrayed the hospitality that I had received and the peaceful, almost friendly, reception that the denizens had given me. But luckily, our number—we were a party of three or four—and our conversations—we spoke loudly—gave them warning. Moreover, we left too late to surprise them at their early morning watering-holes. This new excursion was not a hunting foray but a stroll that was interrupted by a torrential rain shower.

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In the evening of the same day, twelve pack-saddle bullocks arrived at the *sala*. They had been put at our disposal by the governor of Muong Lim. The roads, which had been badly affected by the rains, and the very steep hills that we had to climb when leaving camp permitted us to load them only lightly. Despite all the reductions in luggage, our instruments and our barter goods still formed loads for some twenty bullocks. That was the number that we had requested. The eight beasts of burden still to come, would not arrive until the evening of the next day, they said. Mr. de Lagr e resolved to leave early next morning with all the other members of the Commission. We finally released the boats from Xieng Khong, which had been awaiting the outcome of the negotiations with Muong Lim for three days. I had to stay in the *sala* with two Annamites to guard the rest of our luggage until the arrival of the eight pack-saddle bullocks that were promised.

I waited forty-eight hours, during which the rains continued with such force that the waters of the river climbed more than three meters and flooded the columns which supported the *sala* itself. I learned that most of the bullocks were so exhausted during this short section of the expedition's journey that their loads had been redistributed among the porters. They needed five hours to cover the distance of fourteen kilometers between the *sala* and Muong Lim. It was an indication of the difficulties that we were going to face in the rest of our journey overland during the rainy season. They sent me twenty men instead of the eight bullocks that I expected. I divided the remainder of the luggage among them and on 23 June 1867 I joined the expedition again.

When we had traversed the two or three small chains of hills bordering the river, among which ran small brooks whose beds we used as roads during most of this section, we found ourselves in a great plain watered by the Nam Lim, and in which the *Muong* with this name was sited. The Nam Lim was rather a big river which we crossed in boats; it seemed to come from a lake situated close to the dividing line between the waters of the Mekong and the Salween.

The Commission's camp was situated at one end of the village. It was a long house without stilts, inside which stood some field-beds. The construction of huts on stilts, which raise the floor above ground, was less general here. There was a great throng of people already around our house and I had some difficulty getting in.

## Chapter 2

### *A stay in Muong Lim—The low resources of the expedition—The market of Muong Lim*

Muong Lim was a big village, encircled by well-established rice-fields, where every five days a big market took place. The high value of the goods indicated important trade relations. There were many English textiles on display. We could not help admiring the ability and practical sense of our rivals in the export field. They had created special products for Indochina with the colors preferred by the locals and the patterns that were most appropriate to their liking. Pictures of pagodas and other Buddhist items were displayed in the background of all these textiles, which had exactly the same length and width as those of local manufacture, i.e., before the introduction of European products. When will we have as much foresight, as much attention to future interests in France to try to export our products also, instead of considering only ways of dumping the rejects of our factories?

Chinese customs in relation to money were in use. Money was only a commodity that was weighed and then exchanged against other commodities. We had to have our *ticals* melted down and cast into the shape of the ingots used in the country. These ingots were retailed by subdividing them into pieces of variable sizes using a hammer and chisel. We had to obtain one of those small pairs of Roman scales with three levers and three different gradations which serve for the making of payments and which the inhabitants of the country, following the example of the Chinese, always carried on them. We have to add that there were not two of these instruments that looked perfectly alike and that a merchant always carried two of them, one for selling, and the other for buying. The double usage of the Burmese and the Chinese weights increased the confusion and favored misunderstandings which crafty people knew how to profit from. An

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honest man was always duped in these dubious transactions and we were often in that case.

The population of Muong Lim was less timid than in Siamese Laos of the south, and thronged around us, as much out of curiosity as from self-interest. We were made the most onerous offers of service. The low prices to which we were accustomed made us consider the prices quoted by the locals even more exorbitant. The absence of all government protection had left us at the mercy of all this greediness. To our dismay, we perceived that we were going to be fleeced severely and that the poor cash box of the expedition would not support such harsh attacks for very long. To all the privations that we already had to overcome others would be added, [forcing us] to make savings on our food itself, at a time when the fatigue we had to endure and the sorry state of our health required a more substantial diet.

Two officers were seriously ill: Mr. Thorel was affected by an illness of the digestive tract; Mr. Delaporte had ulcers on his feet which the bites of leeches and a journey undertaken through soaking terrain had aggravated to the point where he was no longer able to walk. We had to think about carrying him on our next march. That was a serious problem on an overland journey, by roads that had become impassable for the bullocks.

To all these worries was added the uncertainty regarding our progress [towards knowing] the intentions of the king of Xieng Tong. The delay in his response foreshadowed difficulties and was to cause hold-ups which would always involve extra expenses. "We are not even rich enough any more," I was told by Commander de Lagrée. "to buy off one of these little chieftains, whose good or bad will can make or break our journey. By being as economical as possible, we may hold out five or six months more. However, then we will be staring ruin in the face. Oh, if they had only allotted us twenty thousand francs more!"<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, we hid our poverty under a proud bearing, always hoping for some happy circumstance which would open a credit line with some friendly despot for us, and we cursed the penny-pinching of the governor of Cochinchina who had so poorly matched our resources with the importance of the journey and placed six dedicated people in a position where, for the want of a few thousand francs, they had to use their energy, their devotion and their intelligence to achieve nothing. We did not doubt—as happened later—that the day we had to borrow in

the name of the French government, the latter would hasten to honor our signature. But, luckily, we were not yet reduced to begging or borrowing from the local authorities and it would be compromising our dignity and the success of our negotiations with them to allow them a glimpse of our shortages.

Commander de Lagrée had paid a visit to the governor of Muong Lim, an old man of seventy, who was waiting for instructions from Xieng Tong as to what kind of relations he had to establish with us. As reserved as his reception was, he clearly saw Mr. de Lagrée as the envoy of a powerful sovereign: a guard was placed around us and our lodgings were made as comfortable as possible. Some Muong musicians even came to serenade us and test our generosity. Mr. Delaporte has already given some notes on Laotian music elsewhere. I will not return to this point: I will content myself with saying that the principal singer had a pleasant voice and that the lively and very rhythmic tune which he warbled did seem to be rather rousing. His companions repeated a very short refrain after each of the verses of the soloist [ ], providing a chorus, sung [ ] with remarkable unison.

*The natives of Mou-tseu—A favorable reply from Xieng  
Tong—Departure from Muong Lim—Reduction of our  
luggage in Paléo—Siemlâp—A tiger becomes our  
supplier—The deplorable state of health of the  
expedition—Religious celebrations—New difficulties—  
Sop-Yong—Ban Passang—Departure for Muong Yong*

The new [racial] types who appeared at this periodical market furnished other objects for study and observation. I have already outlined the new characteristics [we had observed in] the Laotian race . . . since we reached Luang Prabang. I have provided an idea of the native races who, under the names of Khmou and Lemet, populate the river valley from Paklay to Xieng Tong. In Muong Lim we met with other natives who had a very distinctive appearance and a most picturesque dress. These were the Mou-tseu. They have already been described by MacLeod. Colonel Yule suggested that their name might be the same as that of the Miao-

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tseu who inhabited certain districts of the Chinese provinces of Yunnan, Setchouen and Kouy-tcheou today and who had not been assimilated or even completely subjected by the Chinese. We had not seen enough Miao-tseu to assess whether this likeness could be well-founded. However, it would be all the more interesting to see if the Miao-tseu were the only population of Caucasian origin that had survived without mixing amid the incessantly renewed floods of Mongol invasions.<sup>2</sup>

The Mou-tseu displayed an inventiveness and a complexity in their dress that we had not met before in Indo-China. The numerous tinsel-hung textiles which covered their bodies gave them some resemblance to the Bohemian tribes or the inhabitants of certain districts of Brittany. The hairdos [head-dresses] of the women were most original: they were composed of a series of bamboo rings, covered with twisted straw and crested on top of the head. The brim of this sort of hat was adorned with silver balls which dangled in front. Above this there were two rows of white glass pearls; on the left side hung a tuft of white and red cotton threads out of which came a cord formed by strings of multicolored pearls. Flowers and leaves further adorned these [head-dresses] which were subject to the a great variety of modifications. The women wore a closely fitting outfit, the sleeves and skirts of which were embroidered with white pearls with a bow on the bust and a very short skirt which did not reach to the knees. Their legs were covered in tight-fitting gaiters which started at the ankle and covered the whole calf. The gaiters were also adorned with a string of pearls down the middle of the leg. The dress was completed by ear-pendants of colored pearls or made of blown-silver balls, bracelets, belts, hangers and cross-belts which consisted of shells and of Chinese coins with square holes inserted in the belts, crossing over the bust. The men wore turbans, a pair of short, wide trousers and a jacket with silver buttons. The costume of both sexes was completed by a sort of coat made of leaves in the form of a half-opened book which was attached to the neck and which you pulled over your head as a portable shelter when it rained. When the women carried loads they used a wooden plank which was placed on their shoulders and had an indentation for the neck, and to which was attached the basket containing the objects to be carried. In front, this plank was held in place by ropes attached to the belt or which the women held in the hands.

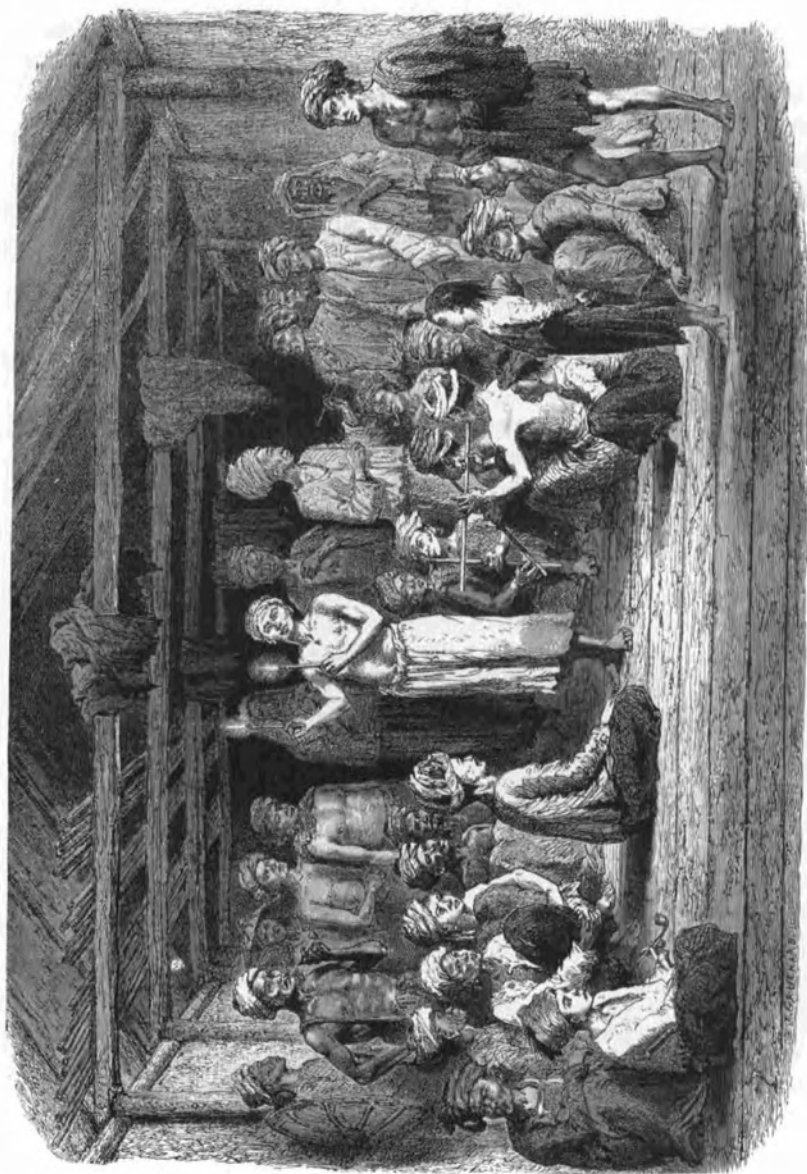
Some of these natives had long hair plaited into pig-tails like the Chinese. Their language differed profoundly from Laotian. It had harsh, whistling sounds

which distinguished it very easily from the other languages of southern Indo-China. They had special chiefs, were very superstitious and not very communicative. They come, they say themselves, from beyond Muong Lim. Mr. Delaporte had all the trouble in the world in drawing a Mou-tseu woman and only after she had been given some small objects and money was she prepared to remain still for a few moments. The comical unrest, which we were able to read on her face, indicated that she believed herself to be in the presence of some caster of spells who might play a bad trick on her.

On 28 June, the governor of Muong Lim finally came to our camp to communicate the answer of Xieng Tong to Commander de Lagréc. It was favorable. King Khemarata of Toungkaboury authorized us to engage men and boats on his territory and to continue our journey in the valley of the river. He informed us that if we wanted to go to Xieng Tong, it would be necessary to request a new authorization. This letter was written in *Lu* characters and it began with an extremely long enumeration of titles. Nevertheless, it reminded us that the kingdom of Xieng Tong or Khemarata<sup>3</sup> paid tribute to Muong Kham-Angva (the Golden Muong: Ava).

The messenger gave us some interesting details of the debates that our request had sparked in the royal council. He had stayed four days in Xieng Tong during which time he had been sent back and forth between the first and second king and from the latter to the Burmese chief responsible for representing the court of Ava to the local sovereign. This official, whose existence Commander de Lagréc had ignored, had without doubt been vexed that among the gifts, sent by the chief of the French mission, there had been none for him and he had put up strong opposition to the authorization for the passage which we had been granted. The messenger had tried to exonerate Commander de Lagréc for this lack of gifts, alleging his ignorance of the presence of a Burmese officer in Xieng Tong. "Why do these people present themselves as powerful and learned when they ignore such things?" answered the agent of Ava. Nevertheless, the king had countered his resistance by asking him: "Why do you fear them? They number only sixteen and we number thirty or forty thousand. Do you believe they will defeat us?"

The chief of the expedition immediately requested the necessary means of transportation from Muong Lim to continue our itinerary. We followed the valley of the river, heading north-east. That was the shortest way to reach Xieng Hong or Alévy, the homeland of our interpreter and the city where in 1837 MacLeod



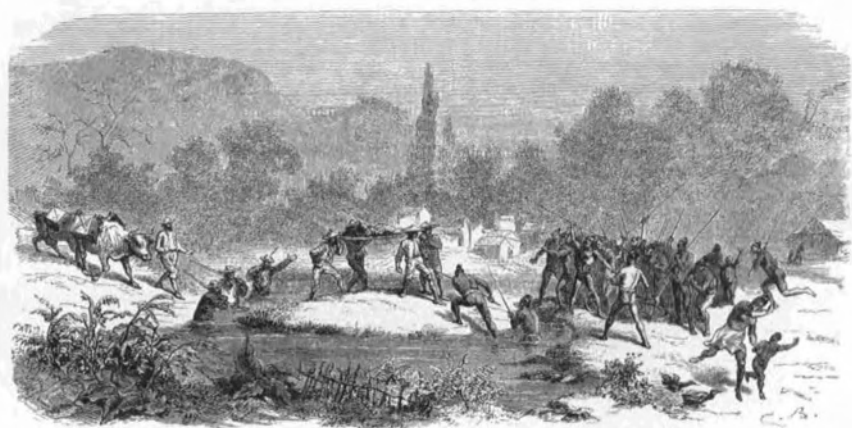
**Plate 6** A scene with singers in Muong Lim (drawing by A. de Neuville, based on a sketch by L. Delaporte).

had ended his journey. It was situated on the right bank of the river, at 22 degrees of latitude north. On the way, besides the territory of Xieng Tong, we had to pass through the territory of Xieng Kheng or Muong You, another Laotian province that paid tribute to Ava and the governor of which, who was a younger brother of the king of Xieng Tong, received the title of king three or four years ago.

Despite the authorization which had been given by the king of Xieng Tong, the local authorities gave us very little help when we discussed the conditions of engagement of our luggage porters: we had to yield to all the demands of the locals.

At no price were we able to convince them to carry Mr. Delaporte, who was unable to walk or mount a horse, in a hammock. Carrying an ill person was to expose oneself to the same disease, said the inhabitants. "I shall complain to Ava about this lack of support," said Mr. de Lagrée. "Write to whom you want," replied the governor. "I can't do anything at all about this." And surely, those administered led their administrators more than the administrators led them. Our Tagals and Annamites had to carry Mr. Delaporte; some of these, who were naturally rather weak, were struck down with fever at present. Before leaving, we ended by having our escort do a firing exercise to reduce our ammunitions and, at the same time, to have the range and precision of our arms admired.

On 1 July we set off on the road to Paléo. At the beginning of our journey, we had to travel over a vast expanse of newly worked rice-fields encircled by narrow banks, partly destroyed by the rain, in which we often ended halfway up to our knees in mud. We forded the Nam Mouï, an affluent of the Nam Lim, with the water up to our belts. Beyond the ford there was a small village. I had stayed on the bank of the river to assist in the passage of Mr. Delaporte and to order his porters who, being all rather short of stature, had to fight against a strong current and prevent the hammock from being submerged in the water. The crossing completed without problems, we prepared to pass through the village to join the head of the convoy which was far ahead, when some locals rushed to meet us and told us to change our itinerary. I first thought that we had made an error and that they wanted to set us back on the right road, but I soon observed, from their worried faces and menacing gestures, that this demonstration was directed against the ill person, whose presence in the village had to be avoided as it was a bad omen. My indignation and that of the men of the escort, who surrounded me, was expressed in a very energetic way so that they dared not insist further. In particular,



**Plate 7** *The “welcome” of a sick person in a Laotian village (drawing by E. Bayard, based on a sketch by L. Delaporte).*

our rifles and revolvers furnished our arguments with an irresistible eloquence. We passed through the village without further incident.

Beyond this, the forest and less difficult roads began. In the evening we stopped at Ban Nam Kun, halfway to Paléo, in the house of a monk which served as the temple. If the inhabitants of this region were intolerant and greedy, the priests, however, practiced hospitality towards foreign visitors in the most exemplary way. As far as we were concerned, they never had to regret this and we always made every effort to adapt ourselves to all the exigencies of the religion and never joined in its ceremonies. The formalities to which we were constrained, because we stayed in sacred places, put very little [inconvenience] in our way. The only precaution to which our hosts seemed to hold firmly consisted in never killing an animal in the grounds of the pagoda. Consequently, Pedro, our cook, went farther away to twist the necks of the chickens and ducks that adorned our table. Gifts, as much adapted to the visible needs of the temple or its priests as possible, rewarded them generously for their hospitality and almost always the gratitude shown to us proved that it was not we who remained indebted.

The next day, 2 July, after five hours of very difficult march amid the small forested hills, interrupted by brooks and swamps among which the path was often lost, we arrived at Paléo, where we installed ourselves in a new pagoda, pleasantly located close to the edge of the Nam Kay, a small affluent of the Cambodia river. The whole afternoon was devoted to weighing out the salaries of our porters. Each of them demanded that we use their weighing scales and put our patience to a tough test. The thirty kilometers that we had traversed from Muong Lim cost us about one hundred and fifty francs. With this tariff, we would not go far and we decided on a new reduction of the luggage. But, instead of giving away our effects, as in Luang Prabang, we sold them: a coat was traded for two chickens, a pair of trousers for a duck, a cotton vest for a cucumber. We resolved to carry our own arms, to abandon the small mattresses which had so far shielded us from contact with the bare ground and to manage henceforth with our covers as bedding and camping gear. Thus we reduced our luggage to thirty quite manageable packages, of which the medicines, the instruments, the ammunition and the money formed the most considerable part. We still had about ten thousand francs in silver, weighing fifty kilograms. Although we had divided it into two packages, the volume of these, too small relative to its weight, attracted so much attention as to require special surveillance by one of the men of the escort on the road.

Paléo was a small place on the right bank of the river. Naturally, I would meet this old acquaintance again: the Mekong river ran there in a plain in which it expanded at its ease, comparable to the most beautiful areas of Lower Laos. However, apart from some fishermen's boats, it continued to be absolutely deserted as a commercial route. The left bank still belonged to Muong Nan and, consequently, to Siam. It was four or five miles higher up that a small river, the Nam Si, formed the border between the Siamese and Burmese territories.

Alligators were abundant on the banks of the river and we were brought a certain number of the eggs of these reptiles. The locals were not above using these in their culinary endeavors. When this new dish appeared on our table, it resulted in an almost general distaste and dislike. I attempted to overcome the prejudice which always attaches to unknown food and I bravely ruptured the fat envelope of these eggs without shells. The contents, uniformly yellowish in color, spread on my plate. I tasted it, hiding my apprehensions under a firm countenance and hoping that I would be imitated. I quickly declared that it was a delicious foodstuff. Indeed, the flour-like and softish taste of this thick liquid contained nothing

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disagreeable. Nevertheless, my example having persuaded nobody, I renounced this gastronomic experience.

In Paléo we found another type of native, the Kha Kho, whose appearance resembled the Chinese type infinitely more than the Annamite type. They had short hair, except for a tail which they rolled in a black turban adorned with silver rings. The dress of the women varied little from that of the Mou-tseu whom we met in Muong Lim. Only the married women had the right to wear a hairdo [head-dress]. It was especially made for the person who was its owner and from the day of marriage, the women and the [head-dress] were never separated: they were interred in the same tomb. The Kha Kho possessed a great number of silver objects which had been chiseled with great taste. They even had pipes made of this metal, depicting quite gracious subjects. They refused to serve as our porters, saying that they feared the heavy burdens, and the authorities of Paléo, probably won over to our side with gifts, did not insist with them. Instead, we engaged Lu people to the next stopover, Siemlâp.

Commander de Lagrée sent his interpreter, Alévy, accompanied by two Annamites, one of whom was the sergeant, a solid and determined man, ahead to this place to inform the local authorities of our coming and to request them to send a letter to the king of Xieng Kheng, to whom Siemlâp was subject and with whom we had to take similar steps as those that we had taken with the king of Xieng Tong, his brother. This time Mr. de Lagrée was careful not to forget the Burmese official who was stationed in Xieng Kheng to watch the local prince, in his distribution of gifts.

Alévy left on 5 July. We would have followed him the next day had it not been for the rains which swelled one of the torrents we had to traverse so much that we were unable even to attempt its passage with men laden with baggage. The seventh having passed without rain, the waters receded and we continued our journey on the morning of the eighth. At night we had to sleep in the forest on the banks of a torrent where we constructed a shelter of leaves to protect us against the showers which would not fail to trouble our sleep. One of them was so heavy that it soon broke down the frail layer of leaves that repelled it and we were inundated under our covers. That, however, was not the main reason for not being able to sleep: besides the legions of leeches and mosquitoes, inseparable companions of the traveler in the forest during this season, the place that served as our stopover was infested with innumerable winged fleas which crept into our

scalp and caused the most acute itching. Early the next morning we were only too happy to move out of this untoward refuge and to breathe an air less infested with insects on the road.

The region we traversed, which had been flat the preceding day, now became mountainous: the forest-covered slopes, that we climbed and descended in turn, sometimes wore a magnificent appearance which worry and fatigue prevented us from enjoying as it merited. Here and there, some flanks were covered with cotton plantations. On the highest plateaux, there sprang up wells, the limp water of which ran under flowering grassland. We ended after five hours of marching in the plain of Siemlâp, where we again had a splash amid the rice-fields, some of which were newly planted. We found Alévy and our two Annamites installed in the pagoda of the village, busy organizing our kitchen. They had already been able to fill our storeroom by a brilliant feat. In the forest, during their journey from Paléo to Siemlâp, a big deer had been slain by a tiger under their very eyes. Without letting this double and sudden appearance confuse them, Alévy and the Annamite sergeant had immediately fired, less with the intention of hitting the ferocious beast which, if wounded, would have become dangerous, but rather to frighten it. The double detonation indeed sent it fleeing and the hunters had been able to finish off the still throbbing deer without intending to. Being unable to consider taking everything, they detached the hindquarters and, arriving in Siemlâp, they had salted it. Thus we found ourselves in charge of a venison supply which would take care of our needs for several days.

On the eighth, the evening of our arrival in Siemlâp, the village authorities had sent Commander de Lagrée's letter to Xieng Kheng. The commander requested permission to depart for this city without waiting for a reply, basing his request on the agreement of the king of Xieng Tong, which evidently implied the consent of his younger brother. After some hesitations, the chief of the village refused and we could do nothing but patiently await the result of this new step. The state of health of the expedition was deplorable: the last marches we had done in the forest and in the rice-fields, the soil of which was soaked by the first big rains and which exuded dangerous miasmas and contained myriads of leeches, had produced fever attacks and foot lacerations which kept half our people on their beds. The bad state of the roads, the seas of mud or the swamps we had to cross to get out of the immediate surroundings of the village, deprived us of the usual distractions of excursions or walks and reduced most of us to idleness. The

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harshness of the inhabitants, who honored their intention to exploit our situation more each day and to make us pay an exorbitant price for the least movement, the ill will or indifference of the local authorities, the fear of seeing the Burmese chiefs of the area go back on an agreement which had only been obtained after long discussion, all these reasons to doubt our success, together with a long isolation and acute physical suffering, darkened our mood and depressed our morale. In the corner of the pagoda that had been transformed into a hospital, we had no other recourse but to return the curiosity that those who came and went displayed towards us, to familiarize ourselves with the daily ceremonies of the Buddhist religion and sometimes also to become merchants. The locals had quite quickly chosen the barter objects we still had in preference to our money and almost all the purchases were made in kind, which spared the purse of the expedition considerably. Squatting on the ground and spreading before us the images, the glassware, and the pieces of cloth, we earnestly discussed with the village housewives the number of bananas, oranges, chickens, fish or ducks that we wanted in return for our knickknacks. Our Annamites, who spoke the local language better than we did, had become quite skilled at this sort of bartering and sometimes they amused us with their subtle reasoning and the enumeration of the marvelous characteristics that they attributed to the European objects in their displays. Sometimes, we asked ourselves what our friends would say if they saw us in this role of hawker-charlatan and the memory of the civilized world, the existence of which seemed a dream to us, suddenly saddened the most amusing transactions.

The river flowed not far away from Siemlâp and I made it the objective of one of my first excursions: after having described a detour to the east, it turned again to the north, was enclosed between two chains of hills and offered navigation that was, if not easy, at least possible for some time. Unfortunately, I discovered only one big boat in the vicinity; it belonged to the village chief. There were others, it appeared, and a great celebration having to take place on the sixteenth at the temple, the chief came on the fourteenth to ask Commander de Lagrécé to leave it [the temple] and to install ourselves in some inhabited houses on the edge of the water. He added that on the seventeenth, after the celebration, the boats would come to take us and that we would be able to resume our journey. But the price was outrageous and Commander de Lagrécé judged it unacceptable. Thus we stayed.

On 16 July it was the first day of the waning moon<sup>1</sup> of the ninth month in the Laotian calendar. This date was the beginning of the *Phu Vasa* (the rainy season), which lasts three months and during which the monks cannot sleep outside or leave their pagoda. Starting the evening before, the priests carefully washed the statue of the Lord Buddha. The village women brought them water and collected the water that had already been used to clean the idol. A great deal of the night passed in unending prayers. Early in the morning of the sixteenth, the crowd thronged to the temple in festive dress. Everyone brought fruits and flowers, burned candles or wicks of cotton soaked in oil and prayed while pouring water into a small trough, made in the floor, from time to time. It appeared that this latter ceremony was addressed to a female angel by the name of Nang Patoram, who was charged with guarding the waters. In the afternoon, the abbot of the pagoda, seated in his chair, would read two chapters of the history of *Sivana Chompu* to the attentive and serene listeners. This sutra must stem from the Buddhist literature of the north. I have never heard it quoted in Sinhalese books. There was a vague mention of the kingdoms of Metila, Takasila and Hoy Het Patta. Naturally, the listeners were ignorant of where these were situated. Takasila (Taxila) was for them the country of the *falangs*; Metila was the old Siam or part of Cochinchina. This ancient Hindu kingdom was located south of the Yamouna, an affluent of the right bank of the Ganges. The sutra also spoke about King Milinda, whose conversations with the preacher Nagasena remained famous in the Buddhist records and whose capital had been equated with the Sangala of the Greek historians. The inhabitants of this city offered strong resistance to Alexander and were all massacred or taken away into captivity by the conquering Macedonian. Concerning Hoy Het Patta, I did not know where this might be, but this was surely another distorted name of some Hindu kingdom.

Here, the inhabitants made a kind of movement with their hands, as if they wanted to brush away mosquitoes, when they started their salutations in front of the altar. The *Phu Vasa* season, which we were now beginning, was one of the most celebrated of the year: there was a celebration every eight days, at every quarter of the moon, i.e., twice as frequent as during the nine months of the *Leeng* or dry season.

Some natives of the Kha Kouy tribe who inhabit the vicinity came to the pagoda during the celebration. They said that they came from the vicinity of Muong Lim. Their language was similar to that of the Mou-tseu whom we had met in

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Muong Lim. Their appearance was different: they looked like Burmese, their nose was arched; their head long; their profile razor-blade shaped; their chin suppressed; their mustache, their beauty-spot and their turban gave them a quasi Arabic look. Some of them had very handsome faces. They dressed almost like Laotians. The hairdos of the women contained bamboo rings and glassware hangers like those of the Mou-tseu but, in general, they were less elegant. They did not have any written language and they worshiped spirits. They buried their dead and each family had its own vault. It is said that they often committed robberies on the roads and MacLeod reported that the governor of Xieng Hong was formerly obliged to make an expedition against them to punish them for their banditry. They paid no other taxes to the Laotian chiefs than some gifts of mats and cotton cloth. They also provided them with rice and porters when they were traveling. They cultivated a lot of tobacco and cotton which they sold to the Chinese. Left aside whether they had anything else in common than their name with the Kouy who inhabited the mountains of Cambodia and of whom I had never met an exemplar.

The night before the celebration, Commander de Lagrée received a new letter from the king of Xieng Tong, which had been addressed to him in Muong Lim and was dated nine days back. This prince invited the chief of the French expedition to come for a rest in Xieng Tong: Muong Lim, he wrote, was a bad village in which foreigners of rank cannot receive a decent reception. The Burmese mandarin agreed with the Laotian sovereign to authorize this move.

What might be the purpose of this invitation? Without doubt the satisfaction of curiosity and self-esteem and the desire on the part of the Burmese to get some gifts which he had not received the first time round. This detour to the west would lengthen our journey beyond measure and it would cost our purse dearly. Commander de Lagrée resolved to evade it and to consider this offer only a mere courtesy invitation which could be declined without showing any lack of deference due to the writers of the letter. He answered in this sense.

On the eighteenth we received a favorable reply from the king of Muong You or Xieng Kheng: in his turn, he authorized us to traverse his small kingdom. Despite the state of health of the expedition, which continued to be deplorable. Commander de Lagrée immediately started the search for porters. This activity was better than prolonging our idleness, which had a bad effect on our morale. A significant improvement had manifested itself in the state of health of Mr. Joubert

who had given us serious worries for a few days and who had been afflicted by a fever that had both typhoid and bilious characteristics.' The wounds on Mr. Delaporte's foot were slowly healing. Nevertheless, we had to refrain from imposing an immediate march on these two officers and on two Annamites, who also had bad feet, and we decided to leave them behind in Siemlâp for a few days. However, the rest of the expedition managed to get back on the way without inconvenience.

The governor of Siemlâp who was given to opium more than to his duties and who was rather badly disposed towards us, had answered the first approaches of the commander by saying that the weather had become too poor and that the rains were too frequent to enable us to continue our journey. The bandit raids were deplorable; all the torrents were over their banks; as to the river, it had become too fast and moreover the Muong's only boat was used to transport merchants and travelers from one bank to the other and we could not take it away from this service. Finally, the replanting of the rice would take place soon and the fields needed all hands available. The governor concluded without blinking that it would be wiser to wait three to four months in Siemlâp for the return of the dry season!

This reply was hardly encouraging. Mr. de Lagrée did not press the governor and looked elsewhere for the help that was not forthcoming from that gentleman. He was very well aware that the inhabitants were in as great haste to regain full possession of their pagoda as we were in a hurry to leave and thus there was an element that almost assured the success of his negotiations. On the twenty-first a low-ranking village chief came to talk to him and asked what he had decided. The commander answered that he had met with a lot of ill will but that he would leave anyway, even if he had to leave all his luggage in Siemlâp. He asked him even to find the governor and to announce this decision. The Laotians were frightened of any responsibility and preferred to carry an object a hundred leagues to put it into other hands, rather than be its guardian for eight days. Thus Mr. de Lagrée's interlocutor immediately asked how many porters we needed and what price we were willing to pay. Commander de Lagrée indicated the figure of fifty porters and a price of two *chaps* per man (about six francs of our currency) to carry our luggage to Sop-Yong (the mouth of the Yong), a village situated at the confluence of the Nam Yong and the big river, twenty-eight to thirty kilometers north of Siemlâp.

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An hour later, the chief came back: he had not seen the governor but he had arranged everything with the other village chiefs. We could leave the next day. Commander de Lagrée had wisely refrained from telling him that Mr. Delaporte and Mr. Joubert would be staying some time: that would have spoiled the whole trick. The next day, there was a new hindrance: they came to tell us the usual story of a torrent [that had overflowed] its banks which we would be unable to pass. In the evening we sensed that this day had been one of bad omens and this was the only reason for the delay in our departure.

On the twenty-third, in the morning, we finally set off again. We thanked the old monk who was the chief of the pagoda and who had really shown himself to be benevolent and hospitable to us and we warmly requested care of the four ill people we left with him.

It was not without trouble that our packages were distributed among the porters. The relative weight of each was not the only consideration that made them hesitate or demand a reshuffle in the composition of each load. Revulsions or superstitions, the motives often difficult to guess, caused frequent quarrels or refusals. I saw that a very light packet which contained camping and kitchen gear was obstinately left aside. I finally got to know the reason: it contained a pair of shoes that our cook, Pedro, reserved for grand occasions. Now, it was impossible to carry, close to one's head, an object which was destined to be put on one's feet. Nevertheless, with concessions, everything was arranged and the long line of our porters soon set out on the flanks of a hill which separated us from the river. After having reached it, we climbed the right bank, which was covered by a dense forest. The rise of the waters had made it impracticable to use the usual path that followed the bank itself: we had to take a route cut out higher on the flanks of the hill enclosing the river. There was a possibility, it appeared, that the king of Muong You might make a journey to Siemlâp and hence, this route which was very little used and had almost disappeared under the grass, had recently been cleared by the Kha Kouy of the surrounding area. The path was thus clearly indicated by large cleared plots but the soil was littered with spiny leaves which ripped our feet apart, and it was strewn with the trunks of small trees which struck our bare toes painfully. At each torrent which crossed the road, the height of the waters obliged us to make a long detour upriver to find a fordable passage.

Despite these difficulties, the fatigue and suffering which resulted from it, this progress in the forest appeared to us preferable to our sad stay in the pagoda

of Siemlâp: the beauty of the landscape remained comparable to the grandest landscapes we had seen and through the curtain of leaves, which the breeze *sometimes lifted with a gust*, we saw the Mekong, in short stretches, filled to its margins and carrying in its foaming waters enormous trees ripped away from the banks.

After a two-hour march, we arrived at the edge of a partly dried out torrent, the rocky bed of which was not at all entangled with the usual vegetation. The stones between which a minuscule line of water oozed, were strangely shaped: they were whitish and covered with saline incrustations. We touched the water: it was warm. The sources of this singular brook, three or four in number, welled up a little farther on, at the foot of a wall of rocks. Escaping from among the stones, numerous vapors emanated and it was not possible to dip one's hand into them. It was only by taking the greatest precautions to avoid scalding my hand, that I managed to dip in a thermometer at the point which I judged to be the hottest: the instrument indicated a temperature of 86 degrees Celsius.

In the evening we descended again to camp on the banks of the river. Despite the rise of the waters, we still found, at the top of a sandy, softly sloping bank, a place sufficiently large to spread our covers and thus we avoided the damp soil of the forest. A few quickly cut branches made up a shelter for us. Unfortunately, the mosquitoes made short shrift of the sleep we were hoping to catch. Commander de Lagrée and I passed the night chatting and smoking cigarettes to keep these egregious insects away. Another worry helped to keep us awake. Sometimes the river rose suddenly and the waters came within a few meters of us. Commander de Lagrée decided not to sleep and seeking to keep a companion also sleepless had taken to saying, every time I was about to drop off: "Look there Garnier, it appears the water is rising." And suddenly woken up by the fear of an inundation, I perched over the border of the water to examine the stones that I had placed there as reference points.

Nevertheless, the night passed without incident. The day that followed was horribly difficult for me. I was gripped by a rheumatic pain in the left knee which caused me to cry out at each step. We had to do five hours of marching like this. At noon, we arrived at the mouth of the Nam Yong, a big and lovely river which we crossed in boats. At 1 p.m., we were installed in the decrepit pagoda of the village of Sop-Yong. It was maintained only by the worshippers themselves. The position of the monk had been vacant for a few years. We settled into his room.

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The village, consisting of four houses, was picturesquely located on the right bank of the Mekong: the great river was here only one hundred to one hundred and fifty meters wide and the left bank was formed by calcareous rocks rising straight and stacking up in front of us like grim faces. Their base was hollowed out and whitened by the rapid waters. We were only four meters above the level of the river and the inhabitants told us that it would rise further, to this height, before the end of the annual rains. We paid just over three francs to our Siemláp porters who returned delighted with their excellent pay.

In the pagoda there were two or three travelers belonging to the Laotian Muongs, situated west of the Salween. They came from Xieng Vi and Xieng Pho, the Burmese names of which towns were Thibo and Theinny. These two Muongs, they said, had no king at present and they were administered by the Burmese. The inhabitants of Laotian race, who were given the special name of Phong, were in revolt against them. The inhabitants of native races, Kha-wa or Lawa and Kha Kouy, were very numerous in the same region, in which they form several separate Muongs. A large number of Phong, it seemed, had fought on the side of the Phasi or Muslims when they revolted against China. I believe that the Phong were Laotian tribes which, on some maps, were called Palong and whose country of origin, which was situated south of Teng-yue tcheou, was called Kochanpri.

These Phong travelers sold gold leaf paper, opium, and some precious stones. They had suffered so much from the bites of leeches during their journey that their legs were very swollen and they were past trading any further. Doctor Thorel gave some medicine to these poor people who were very doubtful about our intention to continue our journey despite the rainy season. "You will not find roads or porters," they said. The general ramshackle look of Sop-Yong told us only too well that the village would not supply us with the porters we needed. We had to recruit them in the neighboring villages. On the twenty-seventh I left in a small boat to carry out this task: I was happy to be navigating on the Mekong again and to undertake a survey to a few miles up river from Sop-Yong. There were none of the big pirogues hollowed out from the trunk of a tree to be seen here. The inhabitants constructed their boats, which, moreover, were very small, from three components. One part, very wide, formed the base of the skiff. The other two parts formed the sides. Holes were made . . . to correspond to the two connecting lines and a piece of rattan was passed through them so that the base

of the boat appeared to be sewn to the two lateral pieces. Stuffing and resin were used to caulk the seams.

After a few hours of difficult navigation I arrived, with the chief of Sop-Yong who accompanied me, at a small group of houses situated on the left bank of the river. I was received in a really pleasant way, without curiosity or servility, by a Lu who had traveled far and wide in the adjacent countries. There were also a lot of fugitive Lu people here, as in Siemláp, who belonged mostly to Muong Ham, the capital of the province situated on the left bank of the river, a little below Xiang Hong. This city was captured and destroyed in 1856 by Maha Say, the governor of Muong Phong who made war on Xiang Hong and who ended up being killed near the latter place which he had sacked and burned, just like Muong Ham. Phongs and people from Muong Lim fought with him against the Lu.

In the afternoon, my host and I spent the time making crude maps, from which I learned at least the Laotian names of the principal rivers of Burma and of Tong King. The Thai name of the Salween was the Nam Koung. The westernmost arm of the Tong King River was called the Nam Te; the other stream was the Nam Ta. My host had gone down the Nam Ta to the sea.<sup>6</sup> The reader may understand how interested I was in these tales. I saw all these unknown regions which had seemed so far away at the start of our journey, now approaching on all sides and unfolding before my eyes. My host's wife served us Chinese-style tea with fruit and cakes which I ate with pleasure during the conversation. I would have happily converted to local customs to escape from the slowness of the unending odyssey imposed on us by our numbers and our luggage. I would voluntarily have renounced both my companions and my instruments to traverse on foot, according to the inspiration of each day, the various parts of this northern part of Indo-China, which was so varied in appearance and which still hid the solution to so many ethnographic and historical problems. Only this life of adventure and constant interaction with the indigenous people is capable of familiarizing a European with the languages and the varied customs of this part of the Peninsula, by giving him the best private tutors: isolation and necessity. To be successful, one must be blessed with energy and unusual health and especially, one should not have any official assignment to accomplish.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, that was not our situation and we had to be content with progressing very slowly: the season, the state of the roads, and the scarceness of people in the area that we traversed forced us to make a stopover of some ten days after each stretch of twenty kilometers. That

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was the time needed to gather the means of transport we needed to continue our difficult journey!

The evening came. We went back after having received the promise of a certain number of porters. We were still far below the number needed. I also bought some supplies, because the few hen houses of Sop-Yong were insufficient to supply enough for our consumption. We went back on the river. In less than half an hour, the current had brought us back to Sop-Yong and this sensation of rapid movement, an event to which we were not used, seemed infinitely pleasant. The light skiff jumped like an arrow amid the rocks which were strewn over the bed of the river, and I admired the safe-handling and precision of its owner.\*

The rains continued and made any work or observation impossible. The level of the river rose each day and it was not without worry that we thought about our sick colleagues whom we had left behind in Siemlâp, and who would find the roads getting more terrible and the journey longer due to the detours which the passage of each torrent would require. They joined us on 30 July, after having taken almost double the time that we had needed ourselves. They dispersed the few illusions we had about the natural goodness of the abbot of Siemlâp pagoda. This greedy elder, whose covetousness had probably been awoken by the generosity of Commander de Lagrée, had shown himself to be very grasping in the end and seeing the last chances of unusual generosity leave together with the last guests, he had insistently demanded objects which were of least use to him. In disgust they had been left him. Did he later confess this lack of generosity towards unlucky travelers in his pagoda?

We totally refused to stay in Sop-Yong but, on the other hand, it was impossible to find enough porters in the vicinity to transport all our luggage in one trip to Ban Passang, which was our next stopover in the direction of Muong You. Commander de Lagrée, who was himself affected by a groin swelling, the result of leech bites, again split the expeditionary column in two. I took the command of one part and on 31 July I left together with Mr. de Carné and Mr. Thorel and half of our luggage. To make up the necessary number of porters, some village women had to join their husbands. Mr. de Lagrée stayed in Sop-Yong with Mr. Joubert and Mr. Delaporte.

At our departure from Sop-Yong, the road, which was easy and well-built, followed the flanks above the Nam Yong. At the time of our passage it was literally

paved with avid and agile leeches, which from every leaf, from every blade of grass leapt upon us. The Annamites of our escort had contrived to make small pads containing tobacco soaked in water [which they] attached to long sticks. It was sufficient to touch these atrocious parasites with this talisman to see them immediately detach themselves and fall to the ground. Since I had my notebook, my compass and my pencil in my hands, and so was unable to use my hands to prevent myself from being bitten, an Annamite took upon himself the task of following me and, without saying a word, he constantly tapped my legs during the whole journey. Never had any watch been more vigilantly undertaken and none of these cursed gastropods managed to pass my ankle without being knocked off and sent back snarling into the mud out of which it had come.

As soon as we had left behind the banks of the river, the valleys of the affluents that run into it widened, the hills became less steep and changed into a series of undulating grassy plains, dissected by swamps and brooks and very suited to various rich crops. Unfortunately, the country was little or not at all inhabited and even less cultivated and on the second day of our journey, after having left the banks of the Nam Yong to climb towards the north, we had to traverse flooded areas covered by tall grass, in which we waded entire kilometers with the water up to our belts and sometimes higher.

On 1 August 1867, we arrived in Ban Passang, an agglomeration of villages situated on a plateau of cultivated rice-fields and soaked by the rains and by plows. We had left the territory of Muong You and we were now in the territory of Muong Yong, a small province under the authority of Xieng Tong and the capital of which was a short distance to the west. A more direct road would have taken us from Sop-Yong to Muong You, without making us pass through the territory of Xieng Tong again, and I had pleaded this course with Commander de Lagrée. "But we would have had to make a four-day march, with some stages in the forest and the chief of the expedition had judged that this effort was beyond our ability. The detour from which he had stopped short would have been fatal to the speed of our march and it would have excessively increased our fatigue and problems.

On 5 August, the other part of the expedition, which had stayed in Sop-Yong, joined us. Mr. de Lagrée and Mr. Delaporte almost immediately left again to visit a very old and very famous *that*, situated to the south of Muong Yong, on the side of one of the mountains that border the plain of Ban Passang on this side.

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Porters were requested from the village chief for the day after next, the day set for the departure of the rest of the expedition to Muong Yong.

A few hours after the expedition chief's departure, two Burmese soldiers arrived at the pagoda in which we were camping. They were charged with presenting an official communication to us. In the absence of the commander and of Alévy, our interpreter, I tried to receive them. They came on behalf of the Burmese mandarin who resided in Muong Yong, and who was the subordinate of the mandarin of Kieng Yong, to ask what our intentions were and to invite us to pass through this place. As I have said, it was included in our itinerary and I was able to confirm to these soldiers that we would grant the request of the Burmese mandarin. Nevertheless, I wanted to assure myself of the nature of his invitation and I feigned [a wish] to reserve the answer in case Mr. de Lagrée should change his mind and should [decide to] go directly from Ban Passang to Muong You. Energetic gestures of refusal answered this overture. The invitation was an order: we had to go to Muong Yong. Probably, the Burmese mandarin of Xieng Tong, disappointed at having let us escape a first time from his claws, had resolved to catch us at any price and he had sent instructions to this effect to his subordinate in Muong Yong. The invitation to pass through Xieng Tong, which Commander de Lagrée had received and declined in Siemlâp, appeared to me from this moment onwards to be an order which we could no longer ignore.

We set off again on 7 August, for Muong Yong. The plain which we traversed was admirably watered by several watercourses, all of which ended in the Nam Yong. A wooden bridge was built over the most important of these rivers, the Nam Ouang and this considerate act, to which travelers in Laos were so little used, provided us with a pleasant surprise: we considered it an indication of a more advanced civilization which would before long manifest itself in a more profound way. Part of this plain was cultivated with rice-fields, the other half was still swamps. We came upon several villages which presented an unusual appearance of well-being and ease. Pagodas with turned-up roofs charmed our eyes and witnessed to the influence of Chinese architecture and the proximity of the Celestial Empire. By noon, we had arrived in Muong Yong, after having traversed the valley of the Nam Ouang over its greatest width, which was about three leagues.

## Chapter 3

*Muong Yong—The first negotiations with the Burmese authorities—Departure of Mr. de Lagrée for Xieng Tong—Detention of the rest of the expedition in Muong Yong—The Chom Yong that—Local history—First information about Mr. de Lagrée—A distressing uncertainty—The success of the chief of the expedition in negotiation—We are authorized to depart from Muong Yong*

Muong Yong was situated on the last slopes of the mountains which enclosed the valley of the Nam Ouang to the west. A wall of raised earth, defended by a moat in which flowed the waters of the Nam Khap, an affluent of the Nam Ouang, encircled this old capital of a kingdom that was formerly powerful, at least if you believe the tradition. We crossed the moat by a wooden bridge. A gate, surmounted by one of those small Chinese roofs the corners of which were formerly adorned with bells, opened into the fortification. A sort of esplanade covered with pretty trees, ran up a slight slope to a pagoda around which the first houses of the village were grouped. On the right side of the esplanade was a great *sala* perched on high posts.

We were barely installed in it than a lower-ranking mandarin presented himself to me and invited me to follow him to the communal house where public affairs were conducted. I tried to make him understand that I was only second in command and not the chief of the expedition<sup>1</sup> and that the latter had gone to pay a visit to the *that* situated a short distance away and that I expected him back any time now. Moreover, the interpreter was with him and it was not possible to understand him and to start serious negotiations without his support. These reasons did not satisfy the local officer: after a short while he came back accompanied by two

Burmese soldiers, armed with sabers and he again brusquely intimated his order to follow him. I replied with a refusal that was no less formal. His assistants then took a menacing stance and put their hands on their sabers. I turned my back on them and ordered the Annamite sergeant to show them the door of the *sala*, with all possible propriety. Unfortunately, the latter performed the task with less gentleness than I had requested from him. Also, once arrived at the steps, which they had to descend quite abruptly, the mandarin and his escort poured out threats against us and only retired after swearing several times to bring us to reason.

After his return, I informed Mr. de Lagrée who arrived a few hours later, about this deplorable start and of the visit I had received in Ban Passang. He approved my conduct. The next day, rather earlier, they came to inform us that the Burmese official would again go to a meeting of the mandarins and that he invited the commander to come too. Mr. de Lagrée, who did not want to lose face by too hasty a move, sent his interpreter Alévy to ascertain the nature of the meeting to which he was invited. The latter came back in shock after a short while, saying that we were dealing with a rather bad man: the Burman had refused to offer him any explanations and had threatened to refuse us passage and immediately to send us back where we had come from. Thus we went to the *sala* with some armed men: the welcome of the Burmese was more polite than his preliminaries had allowed us to foresee. He asked Commander de Lagrée for news of himself and of the emperor of the French. Then he inquired about the objective of his journey and about the passports which he had in hand. Mr. de Lagrée showed the second letter he had received from Xieng Tong.

"But," said the Burman, "Muong Yong does not entirely depend on Xieng Tong and it was necessary also to address a request for passage to me. Moreover, the letter from Xieng Tong invites you to pass through that town. Why are you not going there?"

"The road is too long and we have too many sick colleagues."

"Wait then for ten days or so, for me to obtain instructions from Xieng Tong."

"It is impossible for me to agree to such a delay," the commander replied. "We are all very tired and we need to get to the river."

After a long discussion and the insinuation that Mr. de Lagrée should send some presents to the Burman of Xieng Tong and to his subordinate in Muong

Yong, the waiting was reduced to no more than three to four days. We left, believing that everything was arranged.

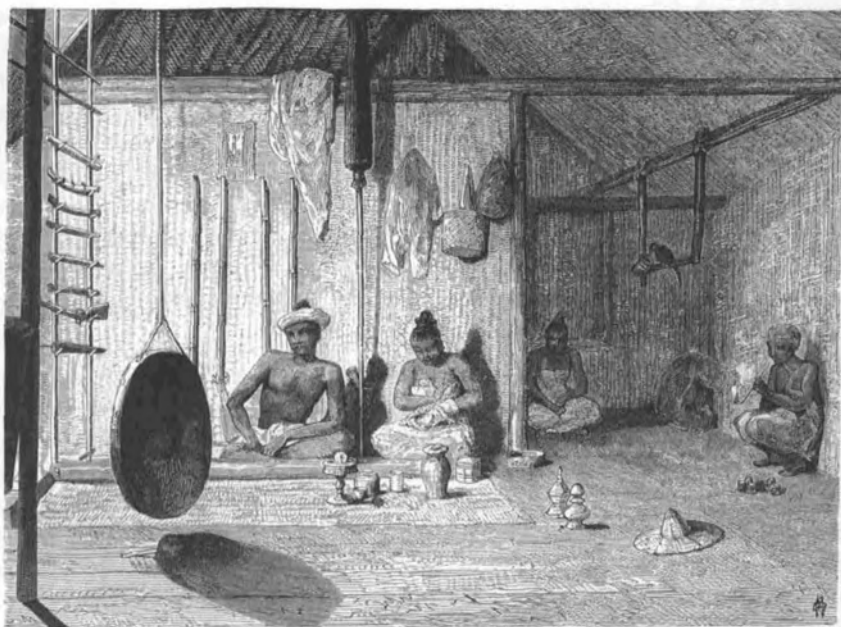
The next day, when Mr. de Lagrée was getting ready to pay a visit to the local governor, who possessed the title of king, the only witness to the past grandeur of Muong Yong, the Burman let him know that he first had to see him. On the other hand, the local people energetically confirmed that it was the right of the king to receive our visit first. Commander de Lagrée requested them to agree with each other and the king, who was soon informed about the exaggerated demands of the Burman, required that his demand be sacrificed. Thus we went to this little indigenous principal, a good man who basically had no influence and no power. Commander de Lagrée asked for thirty-eight porters for the day after next. Leaving this first audience, Mr. de Lagrée and I went to the Burman who lodged with all his people (eight Burmese soldiers) in small, rather badly constructed huts, close to the market of the village. His welcome was cordial. His wife, a young, fresh-looking, pretty Burmese lady attended the meeting and seemed to enjoy quite a considerable influence over the mind of her husband. The conversation was very lively and the Burman showed signs of sincerity and friendship which deceived us for a while. He told us in a confidential tone: "You come from Laos and Siam who are in disagreement with us, you do not have a letter from Ava. These are the reasons for our suspicion. Nevertheless, now that I am assured of your French nationality, I will not place any more obstacles in your way. But if you were English, you would certainly not have continued your journey. You must also fear many other difficulties: be careful with the Chinese. They do not like you and I would be very surprised if they let you pass." The same day, 9 August, he came to pay a return visit to Commander de Lagrée and received a beautiful rifle. His wife and his mother also came to the *sala* and were overloaded with attention and small gifts. The king sent us a very big umbrella, which is used for stopovers in the open air—an entire family would have found shelter under it—in exchange for a gong and some other small objects which we had given him. Alas! this umbrella was for us only an inconvenience which needed one more porter [to carry it]. But it was hardly possible to refuse it.

On the tenth in the morning, the Burman called Alévy and told him that, after further reflection, he could not let us leave just like this. It was indispensable that he wrote to Muong You and that he should obtain a reply. There obviously was a trap in this: Muong You, asked in a certain fashion, without any doubt had

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to retract the permission already given to pass through its territory so that we would be reduced to accepting the invitation of Xieng Tong. Commander de Lagrée, despite the longing he felt to tell the Burman in no uncertain terms what he thought of his good faith, armed himself with patience, went to see him once more, received the most beautiful protestations and ended by twisting out of him authorization to leave on the twelfth. He immediately informed the governor, whom he went to see again on the eleventh, and he complained a lot about the scheming of the Man (this is the name which the Laotians give to the Burman). "We are always in debt to them," he said, "and we always have to pay them. Oh! if the *falangs* (Europeans) were close to us, I would go and live in peace with them." On the twelfth in the morning, our porters were already gathered near the residence of the king, when the Burman called the members of the *Sena* together, displayed the greatest indignation and anger in front of them, denied that he had ever authorized our departure and accused them of trying to obtain gifts from us. The mandarins, who were rather embarrassed, gave us to understand that the porters had come in insufficient numbers and that our journey was again deferred. Obviously the Burman was only trying to win time. The next day, effectively, he called Mr. de Lagrée to show him a letter which he had just received from Muong You. It was signed by the Burmese official and the members of the *Sena* of that place and it read in essence: "Since there is a letter from Xieng Tong which requests the French to proceed there, we cannot receive them before they have been to this town." Evidently, the king of Muong You thought he would offend a stronger colleague and he wisely declined to give an authorization without knowing what had gone on between us and Xieng Tong.

We had to think hard: everyone was overcome with discouragement; fever reigned permanently in the camp and it was almost impossible, given the state of the roads and our monetary resources, to have the whole expedition undertake the journey to Xieng Tong. Mr. de Lagrée resolved to go there together with Doctor Thorel, Alévy and only two men of the escort. The success of our journey depended entirely on the outcome of this move. We began to fear that, in his turn, the king of Xieng Tong would feel obliged to refer the matter to Ava and that he would force us to wait for an answer from the king of Burma. That would have been as much as putting us off forever. Commander de Lagrée promised to keep me abreast of his journey and of his negotiations. It was agreed that if I had



**Plate 8** *The Burmese resident of Muong Yong and his wife (drawing by H. de Montaut, based on a sketch of L. Delaporte).*

to join him in Xieng Tong, with the rest of the expedition, I would leave yet another part of our luggage behind.

Mr. de Lagrée left on 14 August, at 1 p.m. A few hours before his departure, the Burman had offered him, at an exorbitant price, a bad, one-eyed horse and he appeared to be shocked by the blunt refusal that met this interesting offer.

This cynical and obnoxious person gave us more offense every day. Nevertheless, we had to live in peace with him for the fifteen days or three weeks we were to stay in Muong Yong while waiting for Mr. de Lagrée's orders. With the weather still rainy and the fever which affected most of us, we were forced

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to stay put. The illness hit us less when we ourselves were its victims, than when we had to watch its effects on our companions. Silently and broken-hearted we listened to the delirious words of those among us who paid their tribute to the pernicious miasmas of the jungles, and not daring to stop the delirium in action, we had to content ourselves with having the person followed by a man of the escort when he went wandering outside. I myself was affected very strongly by a fever and taken by delirium and I recall abusing our courageous and devoted cook, Pedro, who followed me by order of the doctor, and who was in my eyes guilty of having violated my order not to leave the camp without my permission. The poor devil was about to leave, not daring to call me back to the reality of my situation, and he hid behind the nearest tree to continue his observation out of my sight.

Nevertheless, we received frequent visits. The wives of the king often came to be shown our European objects, to see photographs of monuments in Paris in the stereoscope and to question us about Europe and especially France. The marionette theater of our Annamites had a reputation that preceded us all over Laos. They came to ask them for performances. But their cheerfulness was gone and their miniature actors had lost their voices. I had to use my authority to obtain something resembling a theater performance. Alas! the happy pantomime and the dialogues full of high spirits had run their time. There were more tears than laughter in the jokes of the dolls, and their owners soon burnt them to avoid having to feign a cheerfulness they did not feel.

The Burman's wife was the most regular of our visitors. This young woman showed an extraordinary intelligence, curiosity and gratitude for the trouble we took to instruct her, and her charming grace made us enjoy these meetings. She noticed this and put a certain coquettishness into prolonging the meetings by contriving to find new topics of conversation. In this way I collected some vague information on the upper parts of the country, on the silver mines situated further north, in Kenma, and especially on China which is called Muong Ho here and is only spoken of admiringly. There, they said, were wide roads paved with flagstones, iron bridges and inns at all stopover places. The idea of comfortable roads made us swoon with joy and our bare feet itched in advance. But when would we reach this country of civilization and comfort? This consideration filled all our projects and dreams. It was with despair that we envisaged the prospect, which at this moment was not even the least probable, of having to retrace our steps. To go

back to Saigon after failing in our attempt, having undergone so many weary marches and withstood so many cares, all this without obtaining the compensation of the glory which wipes them away, that was indeed a sad prospect.

To while away these long days of doubt and waiting, our only recourse was talking about the homeland, to savor in prospect those joys of our return, to go over the same projects twenty times, to rehearse the same scenes incessantly in our imagination and to vary them according to the mood of the day, as to who, what, where and why. Sometimes the discussion would turn to politics: had a war come out of the Prussian-Austrian question? We talked over the alliances and computed the chances of victory. We speculated on the news that we would find out at the first civilized place we would reach in a year or eighteen months. Sometimes also—and these were the liveliest discussions and also those that answered best to the state of abstraction in which minds that had been deprived for more than a year of all communication with the outside world, found themselves—we tackled the most worthy philosophical and religious problems. What struck us especially, since we were in contact with the Buddhist populations of Indo-China, was the similarity of the religious instincts of man, whatever race he belonged to and wherever he lived, and the strange resemblance of the traditions, legends, miracles which are at the origins of each belief. It was childish to assume that each borrowed this from his neighbor and to build historical theories, which were, above all, based on the religions convictions of their authors, on these analogies. The spirit of man, which had the same aspirations and the same needs everywhere, followed the same tendencies and aspired to the same ideals. The reasons for believing, as well as the forms which worship or prayer took, were the same among all peoples, whatever point of the globe one visited. Among the less enlightened classes religion reduced itself always to some superstitions, to certain poorly understood formulas. Everywhere, it presented an apparent uniformity which struck even the most superficial observer.

On this, we all agreed: but the disagreement started when we tried to interpret the Buddhist dogmas and to compare their influence with that which the Christian dogmas have exerted on the Western world. I spare the reader our digressions on this subject. I believe that we can only consider all these questions dispassionately when, having retired to another planet, we could contemplate what happens on this small globe that we call the earth, with an eye devoid of partisanship.

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The subjugation of the region in which we found ourselves by the Burmese did not seem final and the conquerors appeared to treat their tributaries cautiously. The role of the Burmese officials was, above anything else, fiscal: they were charged with collecting the customs dues imposed in different parts of the country. All the Chinese traders who traded with the south of Burmese Laos up to Xieng Khong had to pass through Muong Yong and this obligation, no less than the harshness of the Burmese agents and the rebellion of the Muslims in Yunnan, had reduced this trade to an insignificant amount. When we were in Muong Yong, three years had passed since the usual Chinese convoy had made its appearance there.

The administration and justice system remained in the hands of the indigenous authorities who are composed, as in Siamese Laos, of a *Sena*. Only the titles are different: thus the *opalat* or second king becomes the *Paitabong*; the *atchboui* is called the *Poumabong*; the *atchvong* is the *Petchabong*; the *Muong Sen*, *Pyabong* etc. A large number of Laotians, especially in Muong Yong, seemed to regret the passing of Siamese sovereignty and that was what made the Burmese say that the people of this Muong did not have an honest heart and must be controlled strictly. By 1803, Burmese oppression of the Laotian principalities of the north was so great that the chiefs of Xieng Tong, Muong Yong etc. undertook secret negotiations with the chiefs of Xieng Mai, Laphon and Lakon which were subject to the Siamese. The latter promised to give land to all those emigrants who agreed to live under the suzerainty of Bangkok, and at a given moment, to attack the Burmese troops who occupied the territory of Xieng Tong, to evict them. They formally engaged themselves to respect the liberty and autonomy of the immigrants. Consequently, the *tsoboua* or king of Xieng Tong, his four brothers, the *tsoboua* of Muong Yong and a great number of Laotians of their following rebelled against the Burmese and placed themselves under Siamese protection in Xieng Sen. But the malice of the Siamese was not long in erupting: far from respecting their agreement with the immigrants, they dispersed them among the five towns of Xieng Mai, Laphon, Lakon, Muong Phè and Muong Nan, subjecting them to the heaviest taxes and treating them only with harshness and mistrust. The youngest of the brothers of the *tsoboua* of Xieng Tong managed to return to this town with some loyal followers and he was proclaimed king. The present sovereign of Xieng Tong was his eldest son.

In 1837, during his stay in Xieng Mai, MacLeod met the exiled princes, who complained bitterly about Siamese behavior and solicited the support of the

English to help them return to their country. On his part, the *tsoboua* of Xieng Tong had proposed to Bangkok, in a friendly manner, the reopening of the long-discontinued commercial relations between the Laotians of the north and Siamese territory. Bangkok refused this absolutely, lest the exiled Laotians use the reopening of communications to return to their old homeland. The authorities of Xieng Mai especially opposed the adoption of this proposition, which would result in their losing a great number of their subjects. The ancient enmity between the Burmese and the Siamese manifested itself from this moment in several armed attempts on the borders of Karen territory. In 1852, it degenerated into open war. Rivalries, which were growing more pronounced each day, had risen up between Maha Say, the governor of Muong Phong, a province situated on the left bank of the Mekong and the king of Xieng Tong. Maha Say appealed to the Siamese for help and the latter made three expeditions against Xieng Tong; the first with three thousand men, the second with ten thousand men and the last with thirty thousand men. The last took place in 1854 and ended in a veritable rout of the Siamese. It was under the command of the Kromaluong,<sup>2</sup> i.e., the minister of war, commander in chief of all the military forces of Siam. The Siamese army was concentrated in Muong Nan and set out for Xieng Hai, in January. At that point it split in two groups: one, under the command of Chao Phaya Yomcrat, advanced directly on Xieng Tong; the other, under the command of the Kromaluong, took the road that we ourselves had followed and by way of Paléo, Muong Yong and Muong You, it tried to encircle Xieng Tong. But the population had fled the invaders, the rice they were unable to carry had been burned and in each place the Siamese army found only defenders who retreated before its approach, fighting the passes through the mountain every inch of the way. The elephants and buffaloes used for the transportation of luggage and supplies were not sufficient in number and the Kromaluong had to have recourse to Lu from Xieng Hong to obtain provisions and porters. Despite all these difficulties, the Siamese army finally arrived under the walls of Xieng Tong on 26 April. The town was defended by approximately three thousand Burmese troops, seven thousand Laotians and six thousand men belonging to native tribes of the vicinity. The Siamese opened mortar fire which did the town no harm at all: they saw the projectiles coming from afar and avoided them. After twenty-one days, the besiegers had made no progress at all. The rains arrived and threatened to make a retreat impossible. An epidemic decimated the elephants and the buffaloes. On 17 May, the Kromaluong gave up the siege and began a fighting retreat. The

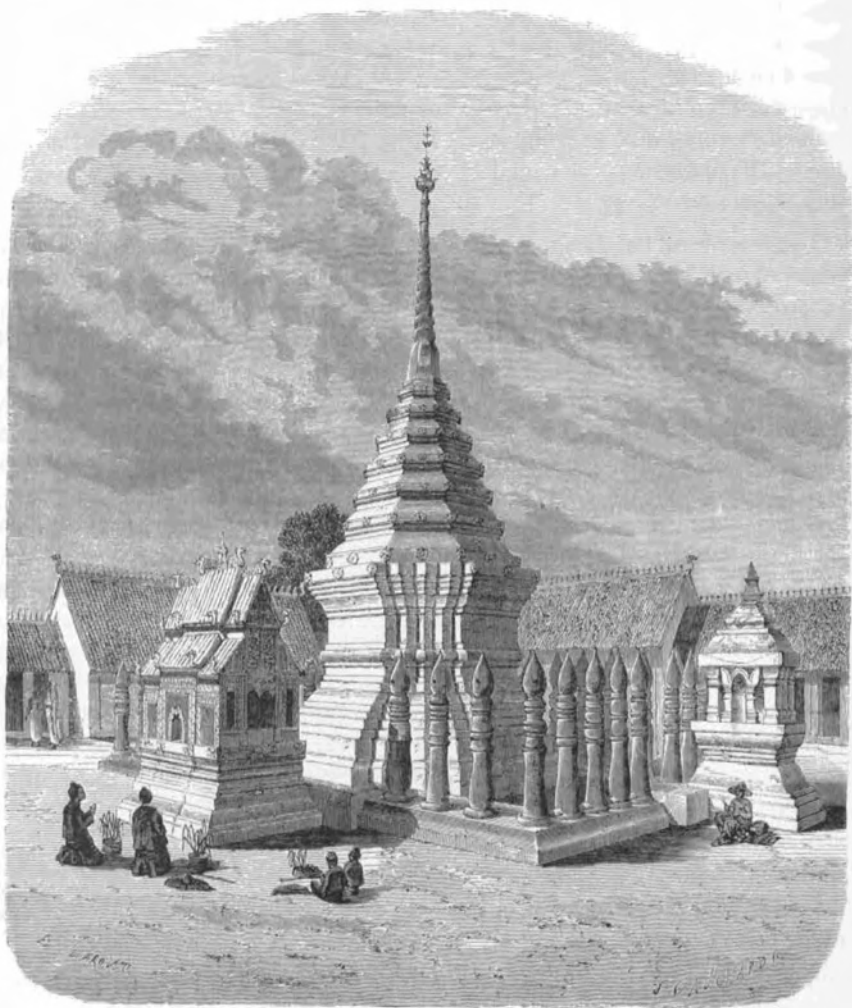
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Siamese were pursued by natives, who killed a great number of them in the mountain gorges. Many died of hunger and misery between Paléo and Siemláp. Numerous trophies were left behind in the hands of the victors, among others a two-wheeled cabriolet of European origin, which belonged to the Kromaluong himself and which Mr. de Lagréc has discovered carefully maintained in Xieng Tong, a mortar of English make and a lot of weapons.

In summary, there was nothing less final than the situation of the Laotian principalities of the north. Having successively had the experience of rule by both Siam and Ava, the locals deeply desired a less violent state of affairs, more regular and stable, and this aspiration, which was general, would be singularly favorable to the attempts of a European power, should it interest itself in the affairs of the region.

I have said that formerly Muong Yong was the seat of a powerful kingdom. Within its walls, we still found sizable ruins of pagodas and dagobas extant: they indicated a state of prosperity and of great power. One of the most remarkable of these ruins rose on the flanks of the mountain under which the village stood. These were layered terraces, in the center of which rose brick monuments. Although very inferior in terms of materials, the principal arrangements and the layout of the various parts of the construction brought to mind the monuments of Angkor. In addition, the Cambodian empire had left a deep imprint in the minds of the people and monks often solicited, with respectful curiosity, some information on the Tevata Nakhon, or "the Kingdom of the Angels," which was the name by which they designated the old Khmer empire. But if we asked what touched them most deeply about these nearby ruins, which they had never visited and which were covered by vegetation, to this and to all the other questions we got the eternal answer *bo hou*, "I don't know!"

That Chom Yong which Mr. de Lagréc and Mr. Delaporte visited and which one could see from almost any point of the plain, appeared to be older than the ruins of Muong Yong. By its isolated location and by the respect that it inspired, it had escaped the destruction which had almost everywhere overtaken those religious monuments within the walls of the town, when they were conquered. Even then, That Chom Yong was a much frequented place of pilgrimage. At the foot of the mountain, on which it rose, ran the Nam Yong, which in this spot was twenty to twenty-five meters wide. A village, the pagoda of which served as a first stopping point for pilgrims, was on the left bank. When one crossed the



**Plate 9** That Chom Yong (drawing by E. Thérond, based on a sketch of L. Delaporte).

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river, one climbed the steep flank of the mountain by quite a good road. Formerly, part of this climb had been done by the staircases, now in ruins. After half an hour of walking, we arrived at a *pouchrey* of huge size, which, according to Buddhist legend, had probably been planted at the time of the monument's construction. The tree was five to six meters in diameter. Very close up, we noticed the ruins of an altar and of a small walled space. A little before we arrived at the plateau that supported the *that*, we came to another sacred well which was very much revered.

The monument itself consisted of large galleries which formed a square in the center of which was a gilded pyramid, overtowered by an iron crown. The foot of the pyramid was encircled by small columns, above which there was a hollow oval in which gifts were deposited. The small columns were called *doc bo* which meant "lotus leaves." There were also small monuments called *Ho*, intended for the same usage. In the center of the eastern gallery there was a small sanctuary. The columns of the gallery were square-shaped and adorned with intricate sculptures. Although they showed traces of several restorations, they were almost completely preserved in their original form and the inhabitants of the country said they were from the same period as when the *that* was first constructed. All the ornaments were made of cement. As in the ruined monuments of Muong Yong, you could see a few similarities between the general lines, the form of the columns and some other decorative features of That Chom Yong and the architecture of Angkor. Inside the eastern sanctuary there were several rather peculiar bronze statues. They were made distinctive by their protruding eyes and chins which appeared to be superimposed. One of them had the date 100 in good characters; evidently, this must have been 1100. There were also smaller marble statues, among which there was a representation of the reclining Buddha, or, as the Laotians called him, the *Prea Nippan*.

To the west, a little below the monument, on a less elevated plateau, there was a smaller pyramid, also gilded. From this point, the view was very pretty: we discovered the valleys of the Nam Yong and the Nam Ouang and the view extended to the line of mountains which formed the horizon in the west.

The most valuable and distinctive historical souvenirs that we obtained in the region were those which were connected with the construction of the *that*. By clearing them of their legendary accretions, we can deduct interesting indications of the kings and the rulers who had succeeded each other in the region. Here is what the *Samaing* or "the chronicle" of That Chom Yong said:<sup>2</sup>



**Plate 10** A wooden statue of the Buddha at That Chom Yong (drawing by L. Delaporte from nature).

“When Pha Kasapa, the Buddha before Sammonocodom, came to the country of Muong Yong, there were no inhabitants and the plain was a big lake. He planted a *pou chrey* on the flank of the mountain; he had brought this tree from Lanca (Ceylon) and he ate rice at the place where now the *that* rises up.

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“At this moment, the natives who came from the east founded seven kingdoms around the lake. Phya Ngam was their principal chief and the number of subjects was about four to five thousand men.

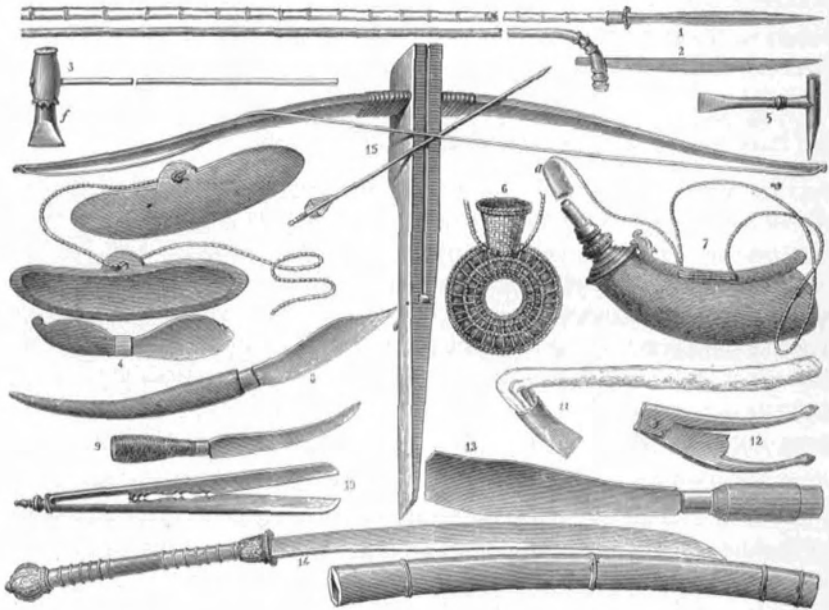
“There were Thais in Xieng Tong, in Muong Lem, in Xieng Sen, in Xieng Hong and to the east of the Nam Khong (the Mekong river), but they were subject to the natives who were much more numerous.

“The prince of Alévy (Xieng Hong) had four sons. He brought them together and told them: ‘The Kha are our masters; it is a shame to be subjected to their yoke. What must we do to gain our independence?’ Sonanta Satrou Kouman, his second son, answered him: ‘Give me five hundred men and I promise deliverance.’ These five hundred men were given to him and he went to Phya Ngam and offered his services. The Kha prince received him with goodwill and authorized his establishment in the country. Sonanta Satrou Kouman then hired natives and had a fortified place constructed which carried the name Xieng Chang. Phya Ngam maintained friendly relations with him and came to visit sometimes.

“One day the Thai prince invited the whole following of Phya Ngam for a great feast. They served three types of wine, one of good quality, the other very heady and the third one poisoned. At the same time the gates of the town were closed and at the end of the meal, they murdered Phya Ngam and the Kha who accompanied him. The whole country was conquered. The king of Alévy sent his three other sons to govern Muong Khie, Muong Sing and Muong Ham. The country, which had already been called Tong, was designated from this moment onwards Na Yong, because there great quantities of rice were cultivated (*Na* means rice-field in Laotian).

“A long time after this, Sammonocodom was born. Fifty years had passed since his entry into the Nippan (Nirvana) when an *olohanta* (saint) by the name of Kiri Malenta brought four sacred hairs. They cited also the names of four other *olohantas* who came: Anouta, Oupaha, Soupitha and Tauna. They brought a bone of the head, a bone of the leg and other relics.

“Sourang Cavati was the king of a country and he donated a golden vase and a vase of precious stones. The relics were put in it and the vase was placed in a deep hole, twenty times six feet deep. The king then came to celebrate a feast: he had his wife Sida and his four sons, Kcomarou, Chomsivirat, Onghat and Somsnouc, with him.



**Plate 11** *Laotian weapons and tools (drawing by B. Bonnafoux, based on a sketch of L. Delaporte):* 1. A spear used for elephant hunts; length: 4 meters and 20 centimeters.—2. A foot-soldier's spear.—3. An ax for cutting trees; length: 1 meter and 20 centimeters, the f-part is moveable and can be turned at right angles. It was then used as an ax.—4. A razor and its sheath; length: 20 centimeters.—5. A screw-driver and a hammer used for gun mending.—6. A box of twisted bamboo for bullets.—7. A wooden powder-horn. The top (a) was used to measure the charges.—8. An ordinary knife; length: 40 centimeters.—9. A stabbing knife; length: 25 centimeters.—10. Scissors; length: 30 centimeters.—11. A small hatchet; length: 30 centimeters.—12. Scissors used to cut areca nuts; length: 17 centimeters.—13. A chopping-knife used to cut herbs or to cut a path through bushes; length: 40 centimeters.—14. A saber and its sheath.—15. A bamboo bow and arrow.

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"Seven years later, the great *olohanta* died. He was buried in the westerly direction, at a distance of one hundred and twenty times six feet, in a place where there is a small pyramid today.

"King Alévy decided that the inhabitants would be devoted to *Chaydey* (Chaitya) and three times a year he came to attend a celebration.

"Five hundred years after achieving the Nippan, the king of Patalibot (Patalipoutra or Patna), Açoka Thamarat, came to fight the kingdom of Vitheara. He gained victory and decided to make war with the kingdom of Kco. The king of this country threw himself in the river and the ranking nobles surrendered without a fight. Açoka demanded to see the corpse of the king and he resuscitated him. Then he gave him his kingdom back and he called it Chulani. Having returned to Patalibot after his victories, he sent mandarins in all directions to built eighty-eight thousand religious monuments all over the countries he had conquered. He erected the *Chaydey* of Muong Yong and he himself celebrated a feast there."

The reader may note that according to the tradition, the *that* of Muong Yong was linked with the oldest and the most celebrated incidents in the establishment of Buddhism. The local chronology erred a little because it placed the reign of the pious Açoka, who lived in the middle of the third century B.C., near our era. However, the reader must not look so closely: it is to the order of the facts reported in these pious legend only that we must attribute some chronological value.

More recent traditions preserved the memory of the conquest of the country by the Chinese. This conquest appeared to me to be placed in the thirteenth century, during the reign of Khoubilai Khan. The Chinese established themselves in Muong Yong, which they made an important defense center for their southern border: they built a fortification, which took the name Vien Chieng Ho, on the banks of the Nam Ouang. Their domination, however, did not last long and the princes of Xieng Mai succeeded them in the government of the country up to the sixteenth century, the period when the Burmese kings seized the whole region up to Xieng Sen.

On 20 August, I received a letter from Commander de Lagréc, written about halfway to Xieng Tong. He had had to abandon the direct road and had made a detour to the south around the mountain range which separated Muong Yong from Xieng Tong. [He wrote that] the country which [he] traversed was inhabited

by natives called *Doc*, whose skills in agriculture and industry were not inferior to those of the *Laotians*, nor did they deserve in any way the label natives or *Kha*, which was given to them by the conquering race. These *Doc* were dressed more or less as the *Thai-Lu*: a deep blue pair of trousers and a jacket with a red turban. Their villages were big and well built; the houses were very large; their roofs reached very low and formed a sort of covered gallery all around. The dwellings touched each other instead of being spread out haphazardly like those of the *Laotians*, and they usually formed a wide, pleasing road. The gardens, in which he noticed carefully cultivated tea plants, were outside the village. The [scarcity of] water . . . in the heights at which they lived probably obliged the natives to group themselves in this way. The water was brought close to the houses by bamboo pipes. The roads in the vicinity of the villages were well maintained and carefully fenced by wooden barriers to prevent animals from entering the neighboring cultivated areas, the main crop in which was cotton. These fences were covered with climbing plants and they formed hedges of greenery which held back the soil brought down by the rains and thus protected the roads from landslides.

The *Doe* were capable hunters. Here, [Mr. de Lagréc wrote] [he] no longer encountered the great forests and the grassy plains which were home to the great quadrupeds of central Indo-China, such as the tiger, the elephant or the rhinoceros, but porcupine and wild boar were abundant and sometimes supplied the kitchens of the inhabitants.

[From the account of] the places where MacLeod had met the *Lawa* during his journey in Xicng Tong and the details which he provided on their customs and their economic activities, [Mr de Lagréc] believed that they belonged to the same race as the *Doc*, although the latter did not at all deserve the words of the English explorers about the dirty and awkward appearance of the *Lawa*. To this group of people, i.e., the *Doe*, we should add the *Leimet*, who spoke the same language and whose dress displayed very great similarities. In the opinion of one of the most competent men in Indo-Chinese ethnographic matters, Colonel Yule, these natives represent the degenerate type of the mother race of the *Laotians* and the *Thais*, in the period when they had not yet been modified by Buddhist civilization. [Mr. de Lagréc] more happily adopted this opinion as the *Doe* today still greatly resemble the *Thais*. The *Doc* called themselves *Hoi-Mang*. They said that they were natives with the same origins and that they spoke a dialect

close to that of those who lived on the banks of the Salween. They called the latter natives Hoi-Kun.

A few Kha Kho villages were intermingled with the Doe villages on the plateau of Xieng Tong. Muong Khay, from where Commander de Lagrée wrote to me, was a large Laotian village inhabited for the greater part by Lu from Muong Ham, who had fled the country when Maha Say, after having stirred up the war between Siam and Xieng Tong, had attacked the Lu principalities of the Sip Song Panna, or "the twelve Muongs," the name which was sometimes used to designate the kingdom of Xieng Hong. Muong Ham, one of these twelve provinces, had more than four thousand registered inhabitants at that time. It has no more than three hundred now.

Commander de Lagrée ended his letter by giving notice of [the arrival of] further mail on the evening of the thirtieth, written from Xieng Tong.

This promise inspired patience in us. Despite the rains, we made a few excursions in the vicinity of Muong Yong. Three to four kilometers to the north, there were warm water springs which we visited. They were situated close to a pleasing big village where we were surprised to find a daily market and a great number of Peguan and Burmese hawkers selling cloth and objects from Xieng Mai. There was an abundance of all kinds of things, while in the capital of the district, in Muong Yong, we often had problems in buying necessities at exorbitant prices. This was the result of the presence in the latter place of the Burmese agent and of the taxes that he collected from the vendors.

On 26 August, the Burman called me: he had received a letter from Xieng Tong, which informed him that permission to proceed had been granted. I leave it to the reader to guess how satisfied we were to be able to put an end to our enforced halt and to continue our journey. Nevertheless, I was surprised that I did not receive a letter from the commander confirming this good news. The thirtieth of August, the date fixed for the arrival of this letter, passed without bringing anything. Our waiting was thus prolonged until 6 September, taking a more precarious turn with the passing of each day. Had Mr. de Lagrée fallen ill? In which case, why did Dr. Thorel not give us any news? Our confusion, which was more than justified by a week's delay, conjured up one reason after another. Our absolute ignorance on what had passed in Xieng Tong and on the welcome the chief of the expedition had met with there, made us conjecture all kinds of

plausible assumptions. There was a rumor running around the country that twenty-eight men sent by the king of Xieng Tong to sell opium in Muong Phong and vicinity had been murdered. Only one man had escaped and had brought the news. We trembled every time we heard such bad rumors on the fate of part of the Commission which was so far away from us.

On 6 September we heard from public rumors that Mr. de Lagrée, instead of coming back to Muong Yong, would leave or had already left Xieng Tong to proceed to Muong You. There was, however, no plausible explanation for his silence from that moment onwards: had the messenger with his letter lost it and did he not dare to reappear, or had he met with an accident on the road? I decided to ask to leave for Muong You with the whole expedition, in order to discover whether we really had recovered freedom of movement again. The Burman made no objection. Orders were given to gather the porters we needed and our departure was set for the eighth. The evening before that day, in the middle of our preparations, the long-awaited letter of Commander de Lagrée finally arrived. It was not dated, but the messenger, who was none other than the low-ranking officer of Muong Yong who had escorted the chief of the expedition to Xieng Tong, told us that he had received it on the first of September. Mr. de Lagrée confirmed the good news that had been given to me by the Burmese resident; however there were strings attached which made us fear new difficulties. At the same time, he gave me some details on his journey and on his negotiations. He arrived with Dr. Thorel in Xieng Tong on 23 August and the two French officers were received in audience by the king on the twenty-fifth. His reception led the chief of the French mission to guess immediately that no obstacle whatsoever would come from that side. The visit made to the father of this prince by MacLeod in 1837—a visit of which the prince retained the best of memories—was perhaps one of the most important reasons for the goodwill he showed to French travelers. He often spoke with Mr. de Lagrée of the English officer, about his costume and his instruments. [as if] . . . all these details had been to him the revelation of a superior civilization. Leaving the king, Mr. de Lagrée went to the assembly of the mandarins. It consisted of thirty-two officials, representing the thirty-two *muongs* or provinces of the kingdom and all nominated by the king and presided over by two mandarins of a higher rank, nominated by the court of Ava. The reception was almost as friendly as that of the king. The next day, it was the turn of the Burmese mandarin, who is designated by the title "*Pou Souc*." He said that it was by very

exceptional favor and goodwill that Commander de Lagrée was permitted to make all the obligatory official visits with such short intervals in between them. Usually, the rule was to let a week pass between visits. The reception which the representative of the court of Ava gave to Mr. de Lagrée was less kind. Commander de Lagrée was asked to take off his shoes before entering the king's palace and, upon his refusal based on the different customs of Europe, they had not at all insisted. The Burmese soldiers who guarded the entrance of the reception hall of *Pou Souc* were not so accommodating and they wanted to force Mr. de Lagrée and Dr. Thorel to take off their shoes by threatening them. These half-drunken soldiers went as far as pulling out their sabers and emitted many insults, among which the word *Angkrit* (English) often turned up. Mr. de Lagrée and his companion immediately turned their backs and let it be announced to the Burmese mandarin that they declined to see him, since he insisted on these humiliating formalities. The latter called the French officers back, made them wait for some time in the audience hall, adopting the most haughty manner that he was able to master, but nevertheless softened on seeing the gifts that were offered to him. He entertained his visitors with a ballet performance given by four or five young Burmese girls twelve to fourteen years old and some strapping men. After the dances came the wrestling. The *Pou Souc* threw the fighters a few pieces of money and encouraged them with his shouting. The impression that Commander de Lagrée got from this first meeting was that they were trying to stall him until a reply from Ava arrived. He used the three or four days they asked for, before they made a decision, to visit the town and its vicinity.

The town of Xieng Tong was located on four or five small hills. It had a wall made of irregularly-shaped bricks, poorly maintained and defended by a deep moat. The total length of this wall was about twelve kilometers. Only a quarter of the space that it comprises was occupied by dwellings. The houses of Xieng Tong represented all sorts of structures, in wood, in bamboo, in pisé. Some were on posts, others rested directly on the ground. The residences of the king and his ranking officials were in wood, covered with tiles, supported by strong columns and with skillfully carved ornaments. The town contained some twenty pagodas, with superimposed roofs and curvilinear aris, the architecture of which showed very pronounced Chinese influences. They were overloaded with gilding and were continually being repaired. The great use of gold leaf which was needed for this kind of decoration and the difficulty of communicating with China, whence this

precious metal was procured, since the rebellion of the Muslims, had increased its value considerably. At the moment of Commander de Lagrée's visit, gold was exchanged against twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three and even twenty-four times its weight in silver, according to the purity of the latter. The exchange rate in rupees was twenty times the weight. About a kilometer to the west of the town there was a *that* by the name of That Chom Sri which was greatly revered: it was under repair. According to the tradition, its foundation was attributed to Açoka who was known by the name of Pha Souko.

Relations between the king of Xieng Tong and the two French officers became more pleasant and more cordial each day: His Majesty invited his guests almost every day to spend the evening with him and, putting aside etiquette, bombarded them with questions about French customs, about Saigon, Cochinchina, Europe, about French language and science. The botanical excursions of our naturalist, who was seen returning each evening with huge bushels of plants under his arms, had very much intrigued the king: one day he had more than fifty species of plant brought and he was very surprised to note that our botanist knew them all. He requested him to perform his work for him and the bistoury, the magnifying glass, the pen, and the ink-stand became in turn the object of his curiosity and his questions. He amused himself by writing down the French names of all these objects and one day he wanted his guests to demonstrate to him the procedure of a European meal. They asked Mouello, Mr. de Lagrée's orderly, to come with all his utensils. They furnished him with chickens, eggs, carrots, pork meat, and small bamboo shoots. The whole was prepared on the spot and served in English crockery and silver cups which composed the royal crockery. The king's wife attended these informal meetings and tried to obtain some remedies against the rheumatics of old age from our doctor. both she and her husband wore luxurious jewelry. At each visit they had new rings, new golden ear-rings in which diamonds and emeralds of a considerable value sparkled. The king had been decorated with the order of Ava, with fifteen small chains and four golden plates adorned with rubies, which he wore as a sash from left to right.

After having seen all the letters which Commander de Lagrée was holding and having convinced himself of his sincerity, the Laotian prince forthwith allowed him to leave Xieng Tong as soon as he wanted and it was agreed that the two French officers would leave directly for Muong You, while a letter would be taken to Muong Yong, to the rest of the expedition, authorizing them to proceed to the same point.

But the Burman did not mean to release so quickly the foreigners he had managed to get in his grasp, and he raised objection after objection. The good faith of the king was thoroughly irritated by this move. He sent three mandarins to the *Pou Souc* to declare that he had wished to see the foreigners in Xieng Tong, that they came, that everybody was able to judge that they were honest and that now they asked to continue their journey and that this should be granted to them. The Burman acted as if he was acceding and gave the king's envoys a written permit for Mr. de Lagrée to proceed on the journey. The mandarins, believing everything was arranged, hastened to convey this to the chief of the French mission. The verification completed, he found that the above mentioned document was a passport to circulate in the interior of the province of Muong Yong and that the name of Muong You was not even mentioned in it! [Mr de Lagrée wrote that he] had to go back on the attack. On 3 September, finally armed with a proper permit, our travel companions left for Muong You after having received, among other gifts, from the king a beautiful horse which was the start of the expedition's cavalry division. It was christened *Royal*, by reason of its kingly origins.

The complex moves by the Burmese resident evidently had the objective of winning time so that he might receive an answer from Ava before the French Commission had left Burmese territory. This answer had to arrive almost at the same time as, or two or three days after, the departure of Mr. de Lagrée from Xieng Hong, according to the information obtained by Colonel (now General) Fytche, the English resident in Burma. Here is the letter that the latter wrote from Rangoon on 9 August 1867, to the viceroy of India: "The French exploration commission has arrived in the Shan State, tributary to Yunnan, East of Bamo. They have written from Mainglon or Maingla to the court of Ava to request the authorization to visit Mandalay.<sup>5</sup> A favorable reply has been sent. This reply left Mandalay on 31 July." This letter ended with details on the towns of Mainglon and of Maingla, situated on the road from Ta-Ly to Bamo via Young-tchang, details which cannot be reproduced here. The honorable English officer was misled, as one can see, about our real situation by the information of the locals. The letter to which he made an allusion was surely the one which was sent by Commander de Lagrée from Muong Lim to Xieng Tong and which requested authorization, not to go to Mandalay, but simply to traverse the Laotian tributary states of Burma.















































































































































and we handed him over to the local authorities, demanding severe punishment. He was immediately put in the *cangue*.

In the mean time, at the request of Mr. de Lagrée, I had a letter in Chinese written by Tei, my Annamite, in which our leader expressed his grievances and demanded a positive reply and more direct communications with the principal authorities of Lin-ngan. A few hours later, we received a reply in which Leang-tajen made apologies and announced his visit for the next day. He arrived at the stated hour. He was a strapping fellow, two meters tall, whose feet, hands and large head were well proportioned. His humble and embarrassed behavior contrasted singularly with his giant size. This was the famous personality from the popular tales: a man of the people without education or rank, his valor and his energy had destined him, from the first battles against the Muslims onwards, to take military command of the south of the province. He had distinguished himself with a red insignia and had replaced the mandarins of Che-pin, Tong-hai and of several other neighboring towns with people like himself. The preceding year he had liberated the town of Lin-ngan, which had for some time been occupied by the rebels. By virtue of this fact, he no longer recognized the authority of Peking and acted as an independent sovereign in the south of the province. The moral power which Mr. de Lagrée exerted over a man placed in this position and whose energetic goodwill had subjected all around him, was not less than extraordinary. His visit was very short and he advised the chief of the French mission that he was going to return immediately to the advance posts, in order to relieve him from making a return visit. Placards had been placed on the walls of our pagoda, on his orders, threatening anybody who dared to trouble the foreigners, with death. Besides, in front of us, he was careful to show himself of an Oriental munificence. All the indigenous people, from close or far, who were connected with us received the marks of his generosity. The soldiers of the escort who had come from Yuen-Kiang received money and uniforms. To all the staff of the expedition he gave large silver plates, a kind of decoration which he was in the habit of giving to his soldiers, and on which his name and the word *reward* were inscribed. They were designed, he said, to protect us from bad luck. We had all the trouble in the world refusing, on the day of our departure, twenty complete uniforms, some rather richly made, which he offered to us and our following.

It was regrettable that the state of the region did not allow us to further our reconnaissance towards the east: it was indicated to us there were silver and lead

























## Further Travels in Laos and in Yunnan

skins of ice floated on the surface of the brooks and the ponds. At 10 a.m. the lake of Kiang-tchouen appeared before us with its azure expanse between mountains covered with snow. Its edges were neither less populated nor less cultivated than those of the lake of Tong-hai. The reddish slopes which came down to the water's edge were covered with plantations of broad beans but the heights which dominated it were arid and deserted; there we found occasionally only some rose-bays. A good road followed the eastern bank of this new lake. It was often cut out from the rocky flanks of the hills, which came to touch the water with their steep feet, and it was protected against the weak swell of the lake by stone piers. A short distance from the end of the lake, an arm of the river, very short, wide and deep, traversed the small chain which ran parallel to the bank and flowed into a second lake which was much greater in size. This was Lake Fou-hien: its banks have a grand and natural appearance. We could not see the southern banks, where the important town of Tchín-Kiang was located. Passing from the basin of the lake of Tong-hai into that of the lake of Kiang-tchouen we left the town of Ning-tcheou, famous for its potteries and for the copper mines in its surrounding area a little way to right.

Kiang-tchouen was a small, dirty town which had been burned down by the Kouï-tseu three years ago but which had risen from its ruins by that patient perseverance and indomitable energy which are the most precious qualities of the Chinese race. We received a noisy, less solemn, welcome there but more comfortable and more cordial than in Tong-hai. The deputy-prefect of the town lodged us in a *yamen* adjoining his residence and for two days we were able to warm ourselves, all at ease, without having to fear any importunities. From this place, Mr. de Lagrée sent to the highest civilian authority of Yunnan, Song ta-jen and the highest military mandarin of the province, Ma ta-jen, two letters to announce our arrival.

Song ta-jen, interim viceroy, had replaced viceroi Lao, who died on 22 February 1867, the preceding year. He was waiting for an incumbent to be officially designated to the vacant position by Peking. This nomination had already been done, but, they told us, the newly elected man, who was reluctant to take up the direction of affairs at such a critical moment, was biding his time under various pretexts in Se-tchouen. Ma ta-jen was a soldier of fortune, whose real name was Ma-hien.<sup>5</sup> He was selling barley when the 1856 Muslim rebellion broke out. It may be appropriate to give an overview of the causes and the principal stages of this war here.









































































































































from the north and the east. It ostensibly poured out its water at its southern end into a river which flowed into the Mekong.<sup>9</sup> The fortress of Hia-kouan, of which I have already spoken, was built at the mouth of this river. The latter was not navigable. Shortly after coming out of the lake, it split into two arms which soon joined again. During the rainy season, the waters rose five meters. During the dry season the chain of mountains of Tien Song, which bordered the western bank of the lake, produced successive violent gusts which made navigation on the lake difficult. This chain, the altitude of which I assessed at five thousand meters, was covered with snow for nine months of the year. On the opposite bank rose hills which belonged to a much lower chain. Between these mountains and the lake there were admirably cultivated plains which ran in gentle slopes to the blue waters. The depth of the waters and their limpidity made them suitable for the conservation and the reproduction of an infinite number of fish.

The most fruitful fishing method, also the most frequently used, was that of fishing with birds. The daring behavior of the fish and the birds had recommended this method to the people of the banks [of the lake]; it was far superior to that which we knew in Europe under the name of fishing with sea-ravens. The fishermen left early in the morning and by making some noise they attracted the attention of the numerous flocks of birds which slept around the water. They threw themselves into flat boats equipped with a holding tank and they let themselves drift with the current. Then one of them, placed at the front, crumbled big balls of rice on to the surface of the water. The fish came in groups and the fishing birds, closely grouped in bands around the boat, dove and constantly came up with a fish in their beaks. Progressively, as their pockets filled up, the oarsmen emptied them into the interior of the boat, leaving hardly anything for each of these winged fishermen, so as not to sate their hunger. After half an hour, the boat was full and the oarsmen left to sell their fish in the market.

Formerly, the plain of Ta-Ly had more than one hundred and fifty villages, which the sultan had tried to repopulate almost exclusively with Muslims. The eastern bank was settled by Min-kia and Pen-ti people who were the descendants of the first Chinese settlers whom the Mongol dynasty sent to Yunnan after the conquest of this province by the generals of Khoubilai Khan. The Min-kia came from the vicinity of Nan-kin. Their women did not bind their feet and the young people of the two sexes wore a sort of unusually shaped bonnet, adorned with silver beads. Their dress and their language displayed a visible imprint of their











































































































































