

# European Explorers in Northeastern Laos, 1882-1893

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## Northeastern Laos

(See Appendix 1 Map)

In the late 1860s, mountainous northeastern Laos<sup>2</sup> comprised “a network of overlapping multi-ethnic<sup>3</sup> principalities” (Jerndal 1998: 814)—Luang Prabang (formerly a powerful kingdom), Muang Phuan (now Xieng Khouang), Houa Phan Ha Tang Hok<sup>4</sup> (now Houa Phan) and Sipsong Chau Tai (an integral part of Tonkin).<sup>5</sup> Divided by a watershed that separates water flowing to the Mekong basin to the west and the Gulf of Tonkin to the east, the “frontier tributaries” (Thongchai 1994: 100) served as a crossroads for trade and communication, as well as a loosely-structured buffer zone over which Siam was, at the time, the dominant overlord although dominance had been historically shared with archrival Annam.<sup>6</sup> (Tuck 2009: 5)

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<sup>2</sup> Laos was not a unified political entity at this time.

<sup>3</sup> James Scott argues that “hill people are best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys—slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare. Most of the areas in which they reside may be aptly called shatter zones or zones of refuge.” (Scott 2009: ix-x)

<sup>4</sup> These territories were, before 1828, gathered under the authority of a supreme chief residing in Muong Hua Muong (the head of the muongs), the suzerainty of which the kings of Luang Prabang and Vien Tian [Vientiane] disputed in turn until Annam intervened and made of this region a tributary province (Tran Nienh Phu). The country was divided up in two parts: the districts of Muong Hua Muong, Muong Son, and Muong Sam Tai came under the Tong Doc of Vinh; those of Muong Xieng Kho, Muong Sam Nua and Muong Soi under that of Thanh Hoa. (Cupet 2000: 141) The name of these territories became “Hua Pahn, Tang Ha Tang Hoc,” and comprised, in addition to the six great districts enumerated above, five small ones: Muong Lan , Muong Het, Muong Ven, Muong Hiem, and Muong Sakok. This would bring the number to eleven and justify the somewhat baroque translation of their denomination: “Heads one thousand, all five, all six.” (Cupet 2000: 146)

<sup>5</sup> The loose federation of Sipsong Chau Tai was probably formalized around the Tai town of Muong Lai (Lai Chau) as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century and paid tribute at various times to Luang Prabang, Burma, China and Annam. (Michaud 2016: 54)

<sup>6</sup> Laos was administered by three Siamese commissioners based in Luang Prabang, Nongkhai, and Champassak. The commissioner in Luang Prabang had supervision of Luang Prabang, Sipsong Panna, Sipsong Chau Tai, and Houa Phan. The Nongkhai commissioner oversaw Muang Phuan (Xieng Khouang), Borikhane, Kham Keut and Khammouane. (Jumsai 1971: 129)

## Arrival of the French

(See Appendix 2 Map)

As Stuart-Fox described it, the disruption of power in this buffer zone commenced with the arrival of the French, “a modern European state with altogether different notions of territorial possession and sovereignty,” who seized Saigon in Cochinchina in 1859 (Brocheux 2011: 25), and in 1867 a Franco-Siamese treaty confirmed the French protectorate over Cambodia. (Brocheux 2011: 27) The French viewed the Mekong River as a potential trade route to China and were concerned that Siamese influence in the basin would affect their strategic and economic expansionist interests in the Mekong’s left bank. At the same time, the French were concerned about possible British intrusion into the basin given their colonialization of Burma and diplomatic friendship with Siam.<sup>7</sup>

In the meantime, the French gradually defined the territories by mapping the region, a technical process unbeknownst to the Siamese and Vietnamese. Between 1860 and 1861, Henri Mouhot was charged by the London Geographical Society to study the Mekong valley (Thompson 1937: 265) and was the first French explorer to reach Luang Prabang, where he fell ill and died. Later in the decade, the French navy initiated the Mekong Exploration Commission led by Doudart de Lagree and Francis Garnier who launched the expedition of 1866-1868 that mapped the Mekong River which they hoped (in vain owing to the presence of waterfalls and rapids) would provide them access to the “supposed riches of the interior of China.” (Wyatt 1984: 195)

Upon arriving in Luang Prabang, Garnier observed that it “is the most important Laotian center in all Indochina,” and that “from now on [the king] should resort to French influence to resist the claims of neighboring countries and stop this tiring search for equilibrium which he tried to maintain among them.” (Garnier 1996 Vol. 1: 295)

Generally speaking, however, between 1867 and 1882 the French colonial initiatives in the Mekong’s left bank entered a period of remission due to their preoccupation with securing Vietnam. (Brocheux 2011: 15, 27) Nevertheless, Dr. Jules Harmand, a French navy physician, obtained permission to undertake a scientific mission that enabled him to venture into the heretofore unexplored left bank of the lower Mekong in 1877 to determine the possibility of establishing an east-west trade axis which would connect Siam (assuming it became a French protectorate) with Cochinchina. (Harmand 1997: ix)

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia Thompson indicated that “the history of [French Indochinese] Missions is inextricably bound up with conquest.” (Thompson 1937: 270)

## Haw Invaders

Until the 1880s, little exploration work had been undertaken in Upper Laos outside the Mekong valley. This was due in part to the arrival during the mid-1860s of marauding Chinese renegades, known as Haw, who were banded together in groups with various allegiances differentiated by the color of their flags (Red, Black, Yellow, and Striped). (Culas 2016: 34; see Stuart-Fox 1998: 138-141; Forbes 1988: 134-144) For more than fifteen years the Haw roamed and ravaged lowland settlements in Upper Laos and destabilized the region as control over the chiefdoms by their overlords slipped away leaving the “managed” buffer zone a political void that rivals Siam and France subsequently sought to fill.<sup>8</sup>

## Francois-Jules Harmand

Prior to Dr. Harmand’s appointment as France’s Consul-General in Bangkok in 1881, the French remained ignorant of the geography and history of the interior of Upper Laos. (Dommen 2001: 14) However, as an arch-colonialist Harmand renewed France’s interest in Siamese activity in the region. He was also concerned about the possible intentions of the British to move eastward after the establishment of a consulate in Chiang Mai.<sup>9</sup> (see McCarthy 1994: 106; Tuck 2009: 63) As a countermeasure, Harmand planned to take action to place Luang Prabang—which he characterized as “the most significant strategic point in Eastern Indochina”—under French control. (Ivarsson 2008: 33)

## Missionaries

(See Appendix 3 Map)

Accordingly, beginning in 1882 French expansion resumed with vigor as moves were underway to make Vietnam and the Lao states protectorates of France. (Brocheux 2011: 15) In 1882 several Alsatian missionaries travelled from Annam to Muang Ngan in southeastern Muang Phuan where they resided before being displaced by invading Haw in 1883. (Breazeale 1988: 89) During this journey missionary Father P. Blanck drew the first European map of Muang Phuan. (Breazeale 1988: 89; see Blanck 1884)

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<sup>8</sup> Mountain minorities, including the Hmong and Yao (Mien), took advantage of the opening provided by the Haw to migrate from inhospitable living conditions and opium trading markets in Yunnan via Tonkin to Laos and relocate to vacant highlands, mainly in Muang Phuan (Xieng Khouang). Most probably clashes took place between the Hmong and Haw which prompted groups of Hmong to evacuate Muang Phuan and move to Siam. (Culas 2016: 32-35; Michaud 2016: 58)

<sup>9</sup> Britain annexed Lower Burma in 1852 and Upper Burma in 1885.

## Paul-Marie Neis

(See Appendix 4 Map)

In early 1883, Harmand made contact with Luang Prabang, an important tributary of Siam, to receive French representative, Dr. Paul Neis, who was dispatched to explore Muang Phuan while en route to Luang Prabang before continuing on to Tonkin through Sipsong Chau Tai.<sup>10</sup> (Breazeale 1988: 65) One of Neis's primary objectives was to secure from the king of Luang Prabang a promise to seek French help in resisting any future British movement eastward. (Tuck 2009: 64)

En route to Xieng Khouang, the capital of Muang Phuan, Neis met the chiefdom's leadership in Muang Ngan near the Annamese border where they sought refuge after escaping from their Haw-occupied capital. Neis told the ethnic Tai Phuan—tributaries of both Siam and Annam—that he came “on behalf of the French governor of Cochinchina to study your country and to establish friendly relations.” (Neis 1997: 51) However, shortly after his arrival, the threat of a Haw attack prompted Neis and the French missionaries he met in Muang Ngan to retreat back to the Mekong.

His cross-country trajectory from Xieng Khouang to Luang Prabang being thwarted, Neis proceeded up the Mekong to Luang Prabang by boat and, in the footsteps of Mouhot, by elephant (Neis 1997: 63) where he arrived in June 1883. In November, Neis ascended the Nam Ou River north toward Muang Theng (Dien Bien Phu) and onward to Tonkin, as originally planned, but reversed track when he learned that much of Sipsong Chau Tai and Houa Phan had yielded to the Haw. Neis retreated back down the Nam Ou to Luang Prabang in December 1883 before returning to Bangkok in January 1884. (Neis 1997: 117) Although Neis did not make any significant geographic discoveries, he did ascend important tributaries of the Mekong which had thus far been uncharted. (Osborne 2000: 123)

## James Fitzroy McCarthy

Soren Ivarsson pointed out that “from the early 1880s Siamese claims to the territories east of the Mekong were framed with reference to a new perception of geography and geopolitical space in which overlapping margins were no longer permissible. In this bid to define exclusive rights to territory and create a bounded Siamese space, mapping became an indispensable technology...” (Ivarsson 2008: 35)

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<sup>10</sup> During this same period, 1883-1884, Etienne Aymonier explored the Khorat Plateau—which the French also coveted—and the accessibility overland and by water of remote areas on the left bank of the lower Mekong and local trading patterns. (Aymonier 2000; Stuart-Fox 1996: 21) The Khorat Plateau was inhabited mainly by ethnic Lao, many of whom were forcibly relocated by the Siamese following the 1828 revolt of Chou Anou, King of the Vientiane principality. (Evans 202: 30-31; see Breazeale 1988: 3) More Lao—especially Tai Phuan—were forcibly removed to Siam from Muang Phuan during subsequent “foreign interference” through 1893. (Breazeale 1988: 1).

Accordingly, the King of Siam decided to send along a survey party escorted by Siamese soldiers under the leadership of a British surveyor, James McCarthy, to search out boundaries (which were not readily definable)<sup>11</sup> and prepare a map of Luang Prabang, Sipsong Chau Tai, Houa Phan and Muang Phuan for the purpose of reinforcing Siamese claims to the territory. (Breazeale 1988, 73-74; Tuck 2009: 82) Between 1884 and 1887 McCarthy led three mapping expeditions to Upper Laos. (see Pavie 1999 Vol. 3: 664-666; see McCarthy: 1994)

Various important events took place in northern Indochina in 1885. The Sino-French treaty of June 1885 gave France sole rights in Tonkin, and the Siamese were concerned that this might clear the way for the French army to pay more attention to the Haw problem and move into areas that the Siamese coveted. (Stuart-Fox 1996: 10) Indeed, in an effort to solidify their territorial claims during 1885-1886, the King of Siam (Chulalongkorn) was determined to annex all regions formerly tributary to Luang Prabang. (Stuart-Fox 1998: 140) To this end, action was taken to clear out the Haw from Muang Phuan and Houaphan, and early in 1886 the Siamese army seized and occupied Muang Theng.<sup>12</sup> (Stuart-Fox 1998: 141; Dommen 2001: 15)

McCarthy did not return to Luang Prabang until April 1892 (McCarthy 1994: 172), and in the meantime he created a map 1888 (Ivarsson 2008: 35-36) that was perceived as Siam's contemporary geopolitical layout. It was later to be countered with French historical maps showing the extent of a Vietnamese space encompassing not only the left bank of the Mekong, but also most of the Khorat Plateau.<sup>13</sup> (Ivarsson 2008: 38-39)

### **Auguste Pavie**

Appointed in June 1885 as vice-consul in Luang Prabang by Consul-General Harmand, Auguste Pavie, an official of the Cambodian posts and telegraph service, finally arrived at his new post in February 1887 after a Siamese-instigated delay. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 230) Pavie's arrival marked the beginning of a serious effort by the French to gather commercial, political, and geographical information about the upper Mekong region. (Breazeale 1988: 94) Indeed, Pavie confided to his colleague: "Let us gently

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<sup>11</sup> It has been said that historic Lan Xang kingdom's King Fa Ngum declared that villages with houses built on stilts would be in Lao territory; if they were built on the ground they would be Vietnamese. Supposedly this system was used by the French to determine the frontiers between Laos and Vietnam. (Simms 1999: 31) This procedure would have been difficult in the nineteenth century following the migration of hilltribes who settled throughout the mountainous frontier "trans-tributary" territory and who built their houses on the ground.

<sup>12</sup> "The Siamese conducted campaigns into northern Laos for five consecutive years beginning in 1882. The first three campaigns were half-hearted affairs... The campaigns of 1885 and 1886...were more serious. (Dommen 2001: 15) Note, however, that Siamese troops ventured into Luang Prabang and Muang Phuan in an effort to settle a Khmu revolt and evict the Haw as early as 1875 and 1876, respectively. (Stuart-Fox 1998: 138-139)

<sup>13</sup> During the Lan Xang era founded by Fa Ngum, the kingdom—with its capital in Xieng Thong, or Luang Prabang—comprised northeastern Laos, including Sipsong Chau Tai, as well as southern Laos, including the Khorat Plateau. (Simms 1999: 26-37; see Sila Viravong 1964: 25-35)

extend our influence in Laos by placing agents there, by letting explorers and merchants travel throughout it, and its limits will become large.” (Stuart-Fox 1996: 21)

Pavie’s objective was to “reconnoiter the country between the Mekong and our first posts in Tonkin by researching the communication lines linking this river with our territories of North Indochina.” (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 223) Like Neis before him, Pavie attempted to travel to Hanoi, but on the eve of his arrival in Muang Theng he received word that Sipsong Chau Tai leadership and their Haw allies were preparing to launch an attack against Luang Prabang.<sup>14</sup> (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 235; Stuart-Fox 1996: 11)

In June 1887, the Chau Tai contingents sacked Luang Prabang, and Pavie escaped down the Mekong to Paklay together King Oun Kham, who he rescued. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 236) The king gratefully told Pavie: “Our country is not a conquest of Siam. Luang Prabang, seeking protection against all attacks, voluntarily offered tribute to Siam. Now, thanks to [Siam’s] intervention, our ruin is complete. If my son agrees, we will offer ourselves as a gift to France, certain that she will save us from future misfortunes.” (Dommen 2001: 17; Le Boulanger 1931: 269) Indeed, it was noted that “‘Siamese help’ in North Laos turned into a virtual colonial exploitation of the area under Siamese control.” (Culas 2016: 38)

On November 25, 1887, Pavie returned to Luang Prabang (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 246), and in January 1888 travelled to the Muang Theng area to meet Tonkin-based French soldiers on a pacification mission who were moving toward Lai Chau (Chau Tai’s capital). Although a Siamese garrison was already posted in Muang Theng, Pavie was “so happy of finally having followed a route from the Mekong to Tonkin and found Frenchmen.” (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 253-256)

### **Pierre-Paul Cupet**

Captain Pierre-Paul Cupet of the expeditionary corps of Tonkin was selected to be part of the Franco-Siamese Commission<sup>15</sup> and joined Pavie in Luang Prabang in March 1888. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 263-264; Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 14-15) Cupet was destined to furnish the mission a considerable amount of topographical and geographical work (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 263), and was to be the primary French explorer to map Luang Prabang, Houa Phan and Muang Phuan while Pavie focused on securing the French position in Sipsong Chau Tai.

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<sup>14</sup> The invasion by Chau Tai and their Haw allies was prompted by the kidnapping by the Siamese of four sons of the Lai Chau-based Sipsong Chau Tai ethnic White Tai leader when they occupied Muang Theng in 1886. (Stuart-Fox 1998: 141) Later, Pavie was instrumental in securing their release by the Siamese which facilitated his ability to pacify Chau Tai and negotiate an alliance with its Lai Chau leadership by 1889. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 338-339)

<sup>15</sup> “In 1888 a joint Franco-Siamese Commission, of which M. Pavie...was the French member, visited Luang Prabang, and defined its boundaries toward [Tonkin].” (Boulger: 1893: 192; Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 339-340)

### **Cupet's First Mission** (March 1888-April 1889)

(See Appendix 5 Map)

Cupet readily recognized that three navigable water courses converged on the Mekong in the vicinity of Luang Prabang— Nam Ou, Nam Suong and Nam Khan—which historically favored the political centralization of the kingdom as well as commercial relations with China, Tonkin and Annam. (Cupet 2000: 29)

In April 1888, Cupet accompanied Pavie in reconnoitering a new road toward Tonkin by passing east across through Luang Prabang and Houa Phan, and upon arriving at the Black River in Tonkin returned to Luang Prabang by a different route while Pavie traveled to Hanoi and Sipsong Chau Tai. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 269-270)

Following his return to Luang Prabang in July 1888, and through April 1889, Cupet made four separate trips from Luang Prabang during the course of his first mission and in so doing crisscrossed Luang Prabang, Houa Phan and Muang Phuan by foot and by boat in the company of Siamese “minders”.<sup>16</sup>

Cupet's fourth trip came to an end on April 7, 1889 when he arrived in Vinh in Annam. (Cupet 2000: 176) During the course of this twelve-month mission, which took Cupet about 5,600 kilometers, of which 3,200 were by road, (Cupet 2000: 177) the regions of the Sipsong Chau Tai, the Hua Phan, Muang Phuan and Khammouane had been visited and explored. Important watercourses had been surveyed and studied, and previously considered obstacles between Upper Laos, Tonkin, and Annam had become communication lines that were quicker and safer.<sup>17</sup> (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 338)

Furthermore, the resources and demographics of the main parts of Laos had been studied. Overland routes had been opened and traveled between Luang Prabang and Tonkin as well as Luang Prabang and Annam, the latter by way of Muang Phuan or via the Mekong and Khammouane. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 338)

### **Pavie and Cupet Sojourn in Paris** (13 June-17 November 1889)

Pavie spent most of his time in 1888 working with the French military in Tonkin and coming to terms with the Tai opposition in Sipsong Chau Tai and their Haw allies. By December 1888 he worked out an arrangement with the Siamese to withdraw from

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<sup>16</sup> Pavie and his team traveled throughout the region with the protection of Siamese forces who were usually accompanied by Siamese officials who served as “minders” suspicious of Pavie's activities. (Thongchai 1994: 123)

<sup>17</sup> The explorers in Laos faced numerous hardships, sicknesses, and dangers. Cupet observed that “the bad adventures, which marked my last journey, bear testimony to the difficulty of communications during this [monsoon] season, especially by an overland route. Thus I do not recommend excursions during the rains to tourists who worry about their well-being and who are in search of convenience. (Cupet 2000: 96; see Neis 1997: 53-54) Neis, Pavie and others found walking barefoot to be more practical and comfortable than shoes. (Neis 1997: 46; Pavie 1999: 240)

Sipsong Chau Tai<sup>18</sup> and pull-back to Houa Phan. (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 309) In June 1889 Pavie—as well as Cupet—returned to France where Pavie was assigned to lead a new exploratory mission to establish the Siamese border along the banks of the Mekong. (Larcher-Goscha 2003: 219) Leaving Marseilles in November 1889, Pavie returned to Hanoi as the head of his second mission comprised of more than thirty French professionals<sup>19</sup> who were recruited to explore, map and collect intelligence in an effort to extend French influence throughout the Lao territories east of the Mekong. (Stuart-Fox 1996: 21; Wyatt 1984: 203) By that time the pacification of Tonkin was virtually complete and, as Stuart-Fox described it, French “interest in expansion westward became more acute and the riches and commercial opportunities of Laos began to be actively promoted.”<sup>20</sup> Stuart-Fox 1996: 21-22)

### **Cupet’s Second Mission** (January 1890-April 1891) (See Appendix 6 Map)

From the geographical point of view the previous mission reconnoitered most of the territories on the left bank of the Mekong and the Nam Ou and demarcated the dividing line of the waters between the Mekong and the sea. (Cupet 2000: 191) In order to complete the survey of the country, reconnaissance had to be extended in the north up to the border with China and in the south to Cambodia. (Cupet 2000: 191)

Gathered together in Hanoi in January 1890, the enlarged mission was divided into two separate groups, their initial common objective being to meet in Luang Prabang in June to organize the remainder of the exploration. The first group under the command of Pavie was to go by way of the Black River in Tonkin; the other, placed under Cupet’s leadership, was charged with reconnoitering the region between Muang Phuan and Cambodia. (Cupet 2000: 191) Cupet’s group included Messrs. De Malglaive, Riviere, Lugan and Counillon, each of whom was given a different itinerary to follow. (Cupet 2000: 13)

Crossing the Annamite Cordillera from Vinh in Annam to Khammouane in central Laos, Cupet’s first stage charted the territory between Lakhon (now Nakhon Phanom) in Siam and Luang Prabang. (Cupet 2000: 192) Their agenda included sections of Muang Phuan located south of the road from Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang, the entire province of Tourakhom and the territories of the province of Sayaboury situated on the left bank of the Mekong. (Cupet 2000: 213) Essentially, they linked up this survey with

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<sup>18</sup> Pavie signed a Protectorate treaty with the hereditary leader of Sipsong Chau Tai on April 7, 1889. (Michaud 2016: 59)

<sup>19</sup> The names and brief profiles of Pavie’s forty team members (who served with him over time) can be found in Le Boulanger 1931: 335-337.

<sup>20</sup> A commercial agency, Syndicat Francais du Haut-Laos, was established in Luang Prabang in 1889 to look after French interests. (Stuart-Fox 1996: 21; Le Boulanger 1931: 292; Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 383)

the itineraries Cupet traveled during his first mission (Cupet 2000: 193), and in so doing he and his colleagues achieved a combined total of about 6,500 kilometers of entirely new surveys, 4,000 of which were overland routes. (Cupet 2000: 229)

In June 1889, Cupet's team rendezvoused with Pavie's group in Luang Prabang before continuing south toward Cambodia to complete their surveys.<sup>21</sup> After completing the Lower Mekong segment of their expedition, on July 7 1891, the second mission came to an end. Pavie left for France and met Cupet and de Malglaive—who returned separately—in Paris to draft the comprehensive map of the geographic studies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 547) which was completed in 1893, “precisely at the moment when the events made it most useful...”<sup>22</sup> (Pavie 1999 Vol. 1: 266)

### **McCarthy Returns to Upper Laos (April 1892-June 1893)**

During the period 1890-1893, McCarthy continued his ongoing project by mapping the boundaries between Siam and British Burma and then made triangulations from northwestern Laos eastward across Luang Prabang (where he arrived in April 1892) and the areas east and southeast of Luang Prabang extending through Muang Phuan. (see McCarthy 1883?) However, while surveying on a mountain near Borikhane in June 1893 McCarthy learned of the Paknam crisis that broke out in Siam when the French blockaded the Chao Phraya River. (McCarthy 1883?: 270) He was ordered to return to Bangkok before he was able to extend the triangulation project south to Champassak and Ubon. A new life for Siam was about to begin. (Thongchai 1994: 124, 127)

### **Paknam Crisis (July 1893)**

Pavie returned to Bangkok in March 1892 as France's resident minister and consul-general determined to make Laos French. (Stuart-Fox 1996: 13) Following action by three French military columns to force the withdrawal of Siamese military outposts on the left bank of the central Mekong (Stuart-Fox 1996:13), Siamese resistance prompted the French to dispatch two warships to the Gulf of Siam in what became known as the Paknam incident. On July 20 [1893] the French served an ultimatum on the

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<sup>21</sup> Upon his departure from Luang Prabang, Cupet observed that “it was with emotion that I said good-bye, probably forever, to this privileged corner of the earth where customs have preserved an exquisite simplicity... My affection quite naturally went to this Laotian population, so gentle, so peaceful and so confiding that gaiety never abandoned them, not even in the worst disasters.” (Cupet 2000: 232)

<sup>22</sup> A copy of the Cupet/Malglaive *Carte de l'Indo-Chine*, published in 1895, can be found at <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/id/5839/rec/13>, last accessed July 3, 2018.

Siamese government demanding the recognition of the rights of Annam to the left bank territories and a list of other concessions. After further exchanges, the Siamese accepted, and on October 3, 1893 a treaty was signed whereby Siam renounced all claims to territories on the left bank and to islands in the river, and agreed to a demilitarized zone 25 kilometers wide the length of the right bank.<sup>23</sup>

Although borders would not be more clearly defined until later dates,<sup>24</sup> Pavie's team achieved their objective to connect Laos to Tonkin and Annam through geographical barriers and a "jumble of ethnological groups." (Thompson 1937: 111) In so doing, Pavie's mapping projects spearheaded French colonial power, (Thongchai 1994: 122) and he was therefore able to fulfill his promise to King Oun Kham and include Luang Prabang under French protection. (Dommen 2001: 18; Breazeale 2002: 297-329) A statue of Pavie was erected in Vientiane in memory of the "peaceful conqueror of Lao 'hearts' and the savior of this *peuple doux* threatened by expansionist Siamese 'designs.'" (Goscha 2003: 266)

## Conclusion

Treaties notwithstanding, disputes over rights of possession emerged in 1893. Laos continued to be regarded as "contested space" by the Siamese (Ivarsson 2008: 60) who, as recently as World War II, strove to regain what they perceived as their "lost territory."<sup>25</sup> During the same period, the French sought to "de-link 'French Laos' from 'Greater Siam.'" (Ivarsson 2008: 93-94) Subsequently, the region's geopolitical schemes, which were originally defined by the explorers engaged by France and Siam, gradually unfolded as their profiles were redefined. Concurrently, the 1893 treaty spurred the growth of nationalism and impacted the ensuing historiographies of "Greater Siam" and "French Laos" that evolved over time.<sup>26</sup>

Soren Ivarsson stated that, "what we can observe here is how two contesting spatial layouts [surveyed by the explorers] were in the making as both parts—Siam and France—adopted the same strategy: transforming premodern systems of dual suzerainty

<sup>23</sup> "In 1893 Lao was incorporated as one of the five associated regions of Indochina, along with Cambodia and Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina in Vietnam. In the north of Laos the Kingdom of Luang Prabang was incorporated as a protectorate. This meant a form of indirect rule in the north while the center and the south were ruled together directly as a colony until 1899, when Laos became a single administrative unit. (Evans 2002: 45-46)

<sup>24</sup> "The organization of Laos as a separate administrative unit within Indochina was a piecemeal process. In the years 1893-94 individual commissionerships were established throughout Laos in order to secure co-operation of local leaders. A further step towards organizational consolidation was taken in 1895 when Laos was divided into two administrative parts—Upper and Lower Laos—each administered locally by a Commandant Superieur. Finally, in 1899 the French merged Laos into a single administrative entity under a Resident-Superieur [who was initially based in Savannakhet before relocating to Vientiane]." (Ivarsson 2008: 94)

<sup>25</sup> In the decade after the treaty of 1893 France had the opportunity to further extend her Indochinese empire, potentially to include all the Khorat Plateau but refrained from doing so. (Stuart-Fox 1995: 120)

<sup>26</sup> For a Thai assessment see Rong 1977: 135-145.

into modern territorial rights and states.” (Ivarsson 2008: 38-39) As pointed out by Thongchai Winichakul, the nationhood of both Siam and Laos was “arbitrarily and artificially created by a very well-known science—namely geography and its prime technology of knowing, mapping—through various moments of confrontation and displacement of discourses.” (Thongchai 1994: x)

Perhaps it can even be said today that although Laos is presently a politically unified and independent entity,<sup>27</sup> to a certain extent landlocked Laos continues to be viewed as a buffer zone and crossroads for trade between modern-day Thailand, Vietnam, and China vying for stronger economic and political stakes in Laos against a backdrop of Southeast Asian and Western interests.

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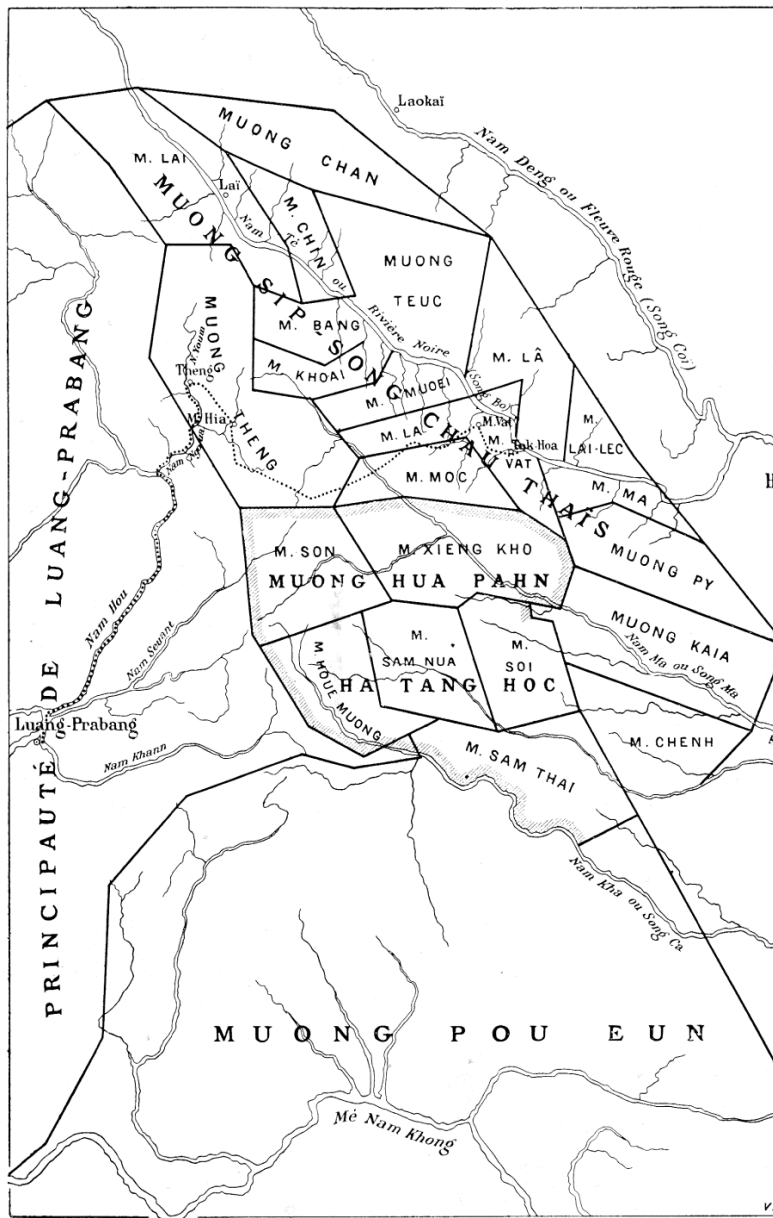
<sup>27</sup> On September 15, 1945 Prime Minister Prince Phetsarath issued a proclamation that unified the Kingdom of Luang Prabang with the four southern provinces—Khammouane, Savannakhet, Bassac, and Saravane... (Dommen 2001: 139; Stuart-Fox 1998: 145) The Franco-Lao Treaty of 1953 establishing Laos as an independent member of the French Union. (Dommen 2110: 219) Under the Geneva Conference following France's withdrawal from Indochina after the First Indochina War Laos was granted independence in 1954. (Dommen 2001: 259)

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**Appendix 1:** Map of Sipsong Chau Tai and Hua Phan Ha Tang Hok (Pavie 1999 Vol. 2: 124)

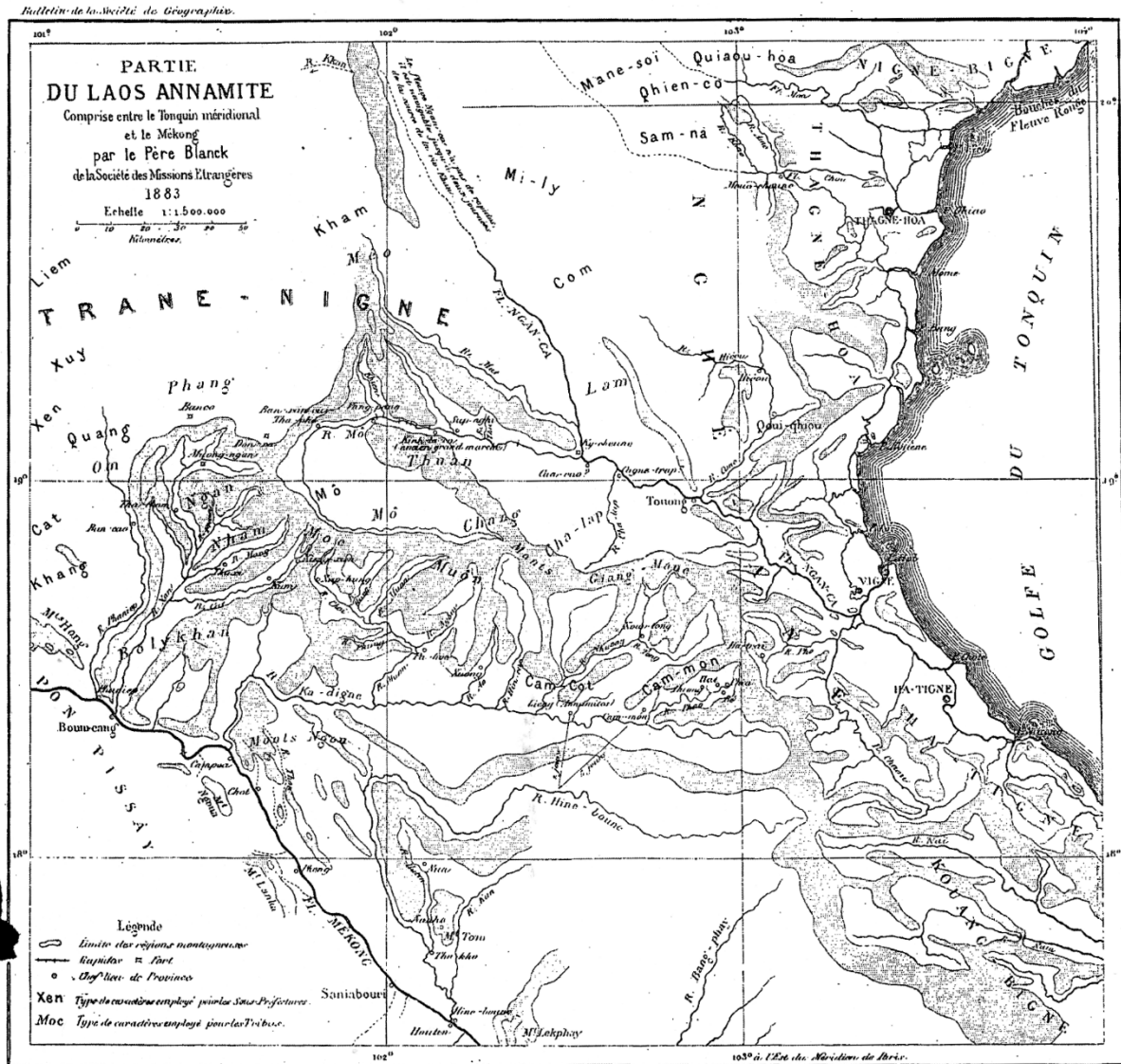


Map 66. Map of the Claims of Siam in the North-East, 1887  
 (..... Planned Itinerary from Luang-Prabang to Tonkin)

### Appendix 2: Route of Mekong Exploration Commission (Garnier 1873)



**Appendix 3: Le Pere P. Blanck's Map of Muang Phuan from 1882 (Blanck 1884)**

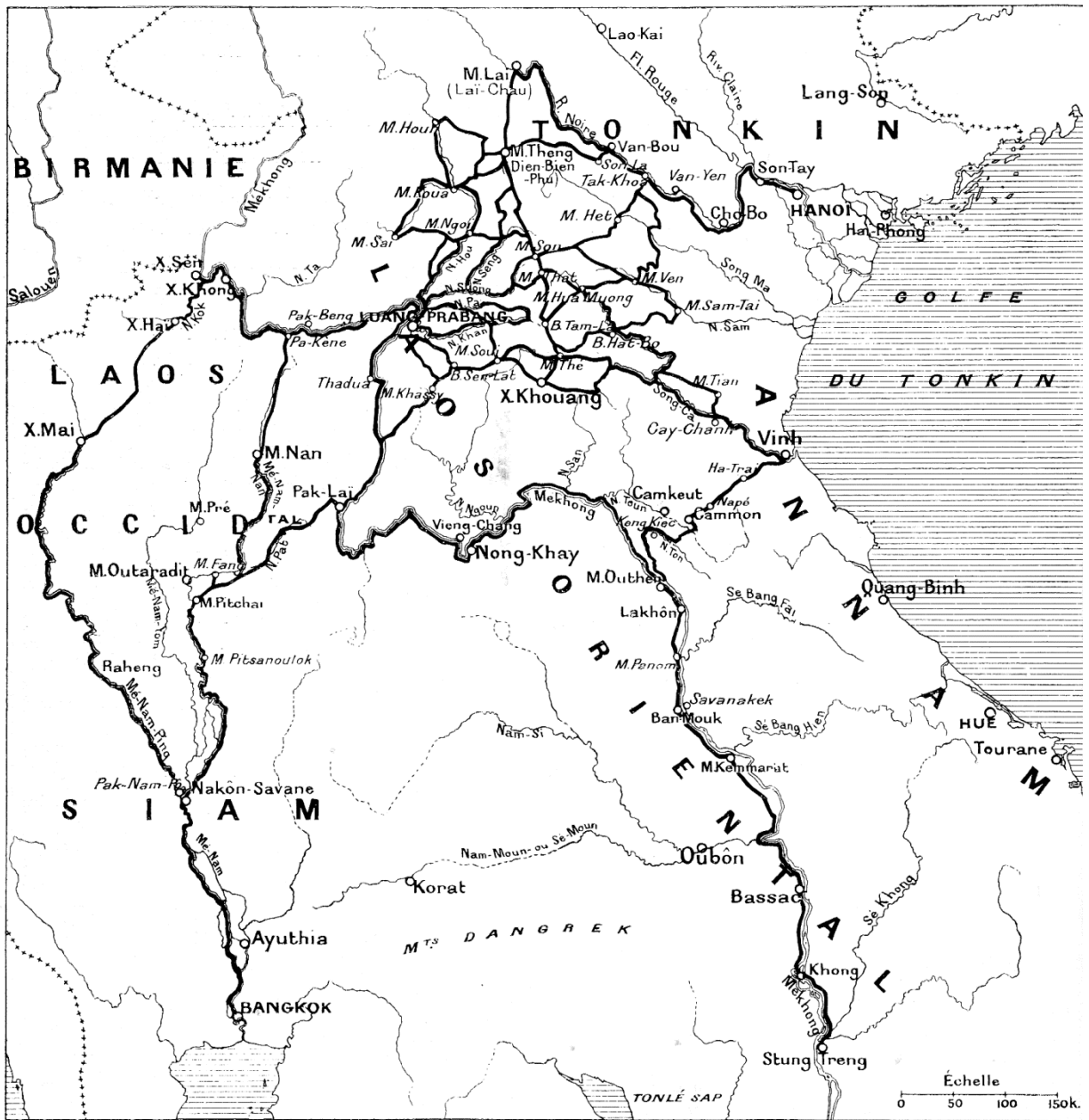


Appendix 4: Itinerary of Neis from 1883-1884 (Neis 1997: 3.)



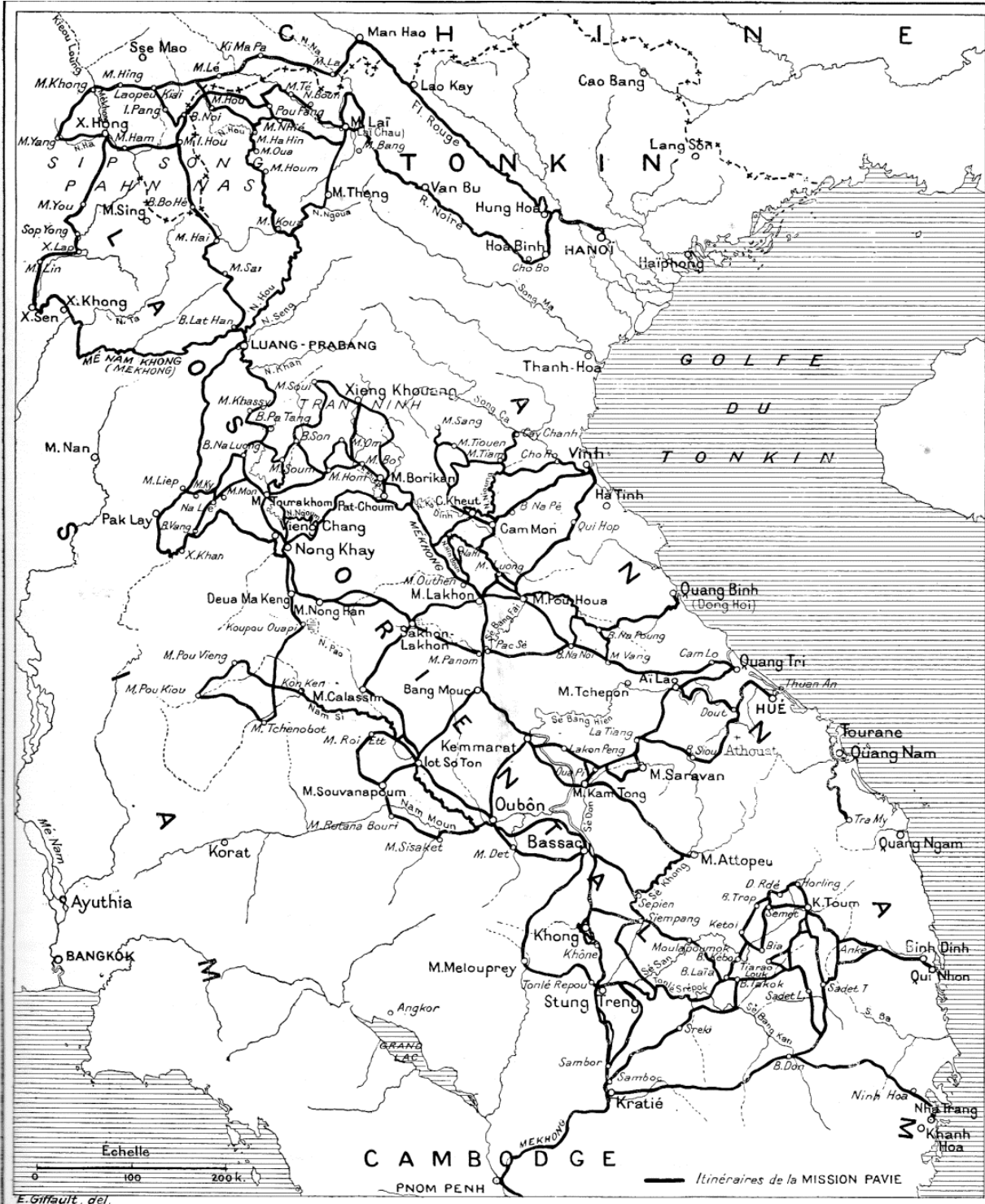
Plate 2 The itinerary of Dr. P. Neis in Laos (broken line).

Appendix 5: Routes Followed by Cupet and Pavie from 1886-1889 (Pavie 1999 Vol. 2: 52.)



Map 17. Itineraries of Messrs. Pavie, Cupet, and Nicolon during the Second Period of the Mission (1886-1889)

Appendix 6: Routes Followed by Cupet, et al. from 1889-1891 (Pavie 1999 Vol. 2: 53)



Map 18. Itineraries of Messrs. Pavie, Cupet, Rivière, de Malglaive, Cogniard, Dugast, Lugan, Counillon, de Coulgeans, Lefèvre-Pontalis, Massie, and Macey during the Third Period of the Mission (1889-1891)