


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ayutthaya's Seventeenth-century Shi'ite Muslim Enclave: A Reassessment

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this article is to reconstruct the date, location, and significance of Ayutthaya's Shi'ite enclave within the former Siamese capital during the seventeenth century. This reassessment is based on a mixture of Persian, Thai, and European sources that clarify the confused picture generated by European cartographers that has for too long cast a shadow over Muslim studies in Thailand. Following a summary of extant explanations and a description of my primary sources and methodological approach, I summarise two aspects of Muslim presence in Ayutthaya. First, I introduce readers to connections between the incremental growth of the Muslim presence in Ayutthaya during the sixteenth century with geopolitical developments on the eastern littoral of the Bay of Bengal. Second, I present the range of accounts provided in primary sources specifically mentioning Ayutthaya's Muslim enclave. Having orientated readers to the origins of the Muslim presence within Ayutthaya's citadel, I incrementally introduce annotated portions of Thai and European maps. These clarify confusion about where and when this Shi'ite mosque was constructed. I conclude with comments about how this reassessment brings into focus the presence of Shi'ite *'alid* piety, Shi'ite polemics about local Sunnis, Siamese conversion to Shi'ism, and distinctions between these "Moors" and "Malays."

Keywords: Siam; Thailand; Ayutthaya; Shi'ism; cartography

Introduction

This article presents a reassessment of the Shi'ite mosque constructed inside Ayutthaya's walled city, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This mosque was part of the Shi'ite Muslim enclave mentioned in a range of Siamese, European, and Persian primary sources.¹ The initial impetus for this article was my growing awareness of the confusing picture of the Muslim presence inside the former Siamese capital provided in some of the best-known cartographic sources from the seventeenth century. This is demonstrated in [figure 1](#) that juxtaposes Jacques Nicolas Bellin's *Plan de la Ville de Siam, Capitale du Royaume de ce Nom; Levé par un Ingénieur François en 1687* [Plan of the City of Siam: A French Engineer's Plan of Ayutthaya, 1687] (top), and *Ville de Siam ou Juthia* [The City of Siam or Ayutthaya] (1697) (bottom). In the former, site QQ is *Rue des Maures* (Moor Street), which appears in the legend but is absent in the map. In the latter, *Rue des Maures* is site A, which appears in both the legend and the map. Nevertheless, its location corresponds to Site P in Bellin's 1687 map (Sternstein 1965: 90).²

That John Andrews's *A Plan of the City of Siam or Juthia* (Andrews 1792: 79) was based on Bellin's work is demonstrated by his reference to Muslim Street (Site 9). This corresponds to Bellin's Site P (1687)

¹The two most important authorities on Persian/Indo-Persian Shi'ite communities in Siam during the Ayutthaya period are Julispong Chularatana (Julispong Chularatana 1999, 2007, 2008, 2017a, 2017b), and Christoph Marcinkowski (Marcinkowski 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015).

²Bellin's "Plan de la Ville de Siam" (1697) is available at: <https://antiqueprintmaproom.com/product/ville-de-siam-ou-juthia-jacques-nicholas-bellin/>. For *Ville de Siam ou Juthia*, see: <https://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/74277/ville-de-siam-ou-juthia-bellin>.

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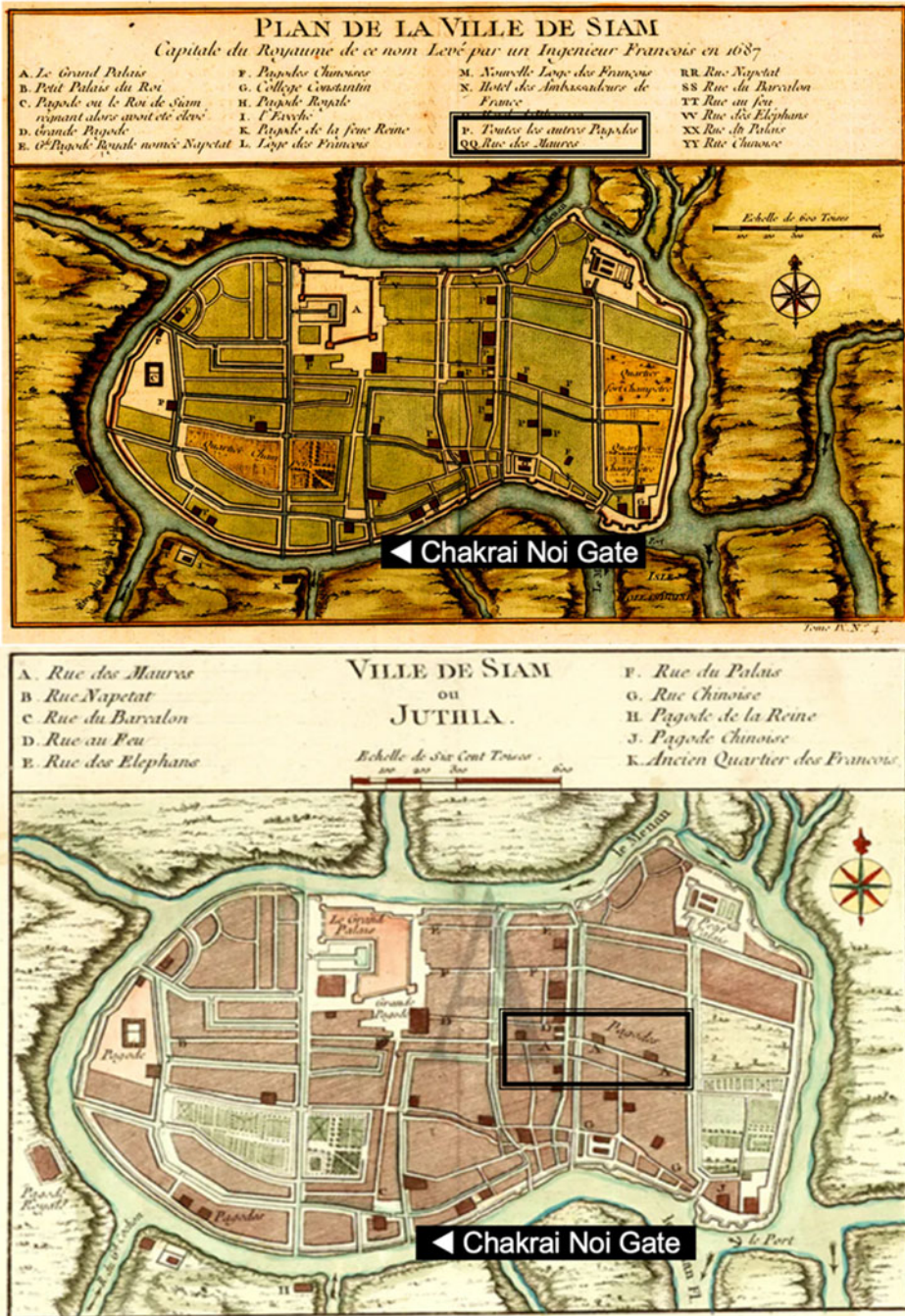


Figure 1. Cartographic Collage of Jacques Nicolas Bellin’s *Plan de la Ville de Siam, Capitale du Royaume de ce Nom*; Levé par un Ingénieur François en 1687 (top), and *Ville de Siam ou Juthia* (1697) (bottom), including the location of the Chakrai Noi (water) Gate.

and Site A (1697). *Siam, ò Iudia* (1696) by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli (1650–1718), is another European map mentioning a Muslim enclave northwest of the Chakrai Noi (water) Gate (included in figure 1).³ Chris Baker has criticized Coronelli’s work as both cartographically “very inaccurate”, and containing

³Coronelli’s *Siam, ò Iudia* (1696) is available at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b5962997b/f1.item.r=Siam.zoom>. This was based on Jean de Courtaulin de Maguelonne’s *Siam ou Iudia, Capitale du Royaume de Siam Dessigné sur le lieu Par Mr Courtaulin missre Apostolique de la Chine* (1686). Courtaulin was based in Siam from October 1672 to June 1674.

too much “impressionistic detail” (Baker et al. 2005: 6). Nevertheless, *Siam, ou l’Inde* both bears no resemblance to Bellin’s *Plan de la Ville de Siam* (1687), but also mentions a Muslim enclave inside within the walls. This is specific aspect of Coronelli’s wider interest in visualizing the specifically religious elements of Siamese cosmopolitanism. This includes no less than five mosques south, west, and north of the city cited by Japanese historian Seiji Imanaga (Imanaga 1993).

The enduring influence of Bellin on discussions of Muslim communities during the Ayutthaya period is demonstrated in Julispong Chularatana’s recent the map of Muslim presence (Julispong Chularatana 2007: 96).⁴ This includes Ayutthaya’s “Indo-Iranian Community,” which I reconstruct below. Nevertheless, Julispong also included “Moor Street” in a location corresponding to Site A in Bellin’s *Ville de Siam ou Juthia* (1697). The perpetuation of Bellin’s 1687 blunder by this Thai specialist who has interacted with the Persian and Thai primary sources demonstrates that European cartography continues to cast a lamentably long shadow after the explosion of the digital humanities that has made once hard-to-come-by maps accessible to (both amateur and professional) historians.

My reassessment of what I argue was a specifically Shi’ite mosque inside Ayutthaya’s walled city begins with comments about sources and methodological notes. The primary purpose of the next section is to describe the growing Muslim presence from the sixteenth century, as chronicled in the relevant secondary literature. I also present reasons for dating the construction of this mosque at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This is followed by curating—sometimes frustratingly passing—references in Persian and European primary sources to Ayutthaya’s Muslim enclave and mosques. Having provided details about the history of the Muslim presence in sixteenth-century Ayutthaya that led to this Shi’ite mosque being erected inside the city, I incrementally introduce annotated portions of both Siamese and European maps. These cartographic sources—as well as the first-hand accounts—clarify the precise location of Ayutthaya’s Shi’ite enclave and its mosque. I conclude by exploring what the presence of this Shi’ite mosque inside the city suggests about both the religious aspects of Siamese cosmopolitanism and Sunni-Shi’ite relations in Siam during the seventeenth century. In an effort to maintain focus on the specific issues at hand, I have limited the discussion to the Muslim presence *within* the city. This means that Ayutthaya’s (predominantly Sunni) Muslim enclaves south of the city will not be included here.

Notes on Sources and Methodology

I have already made mention of the inadequacies of some of the best known and widely cited European maps. This section provides details about the range of primary sources that my reconstruction of this Shi’ite mosque is based upon. Two are attributed to Phraya Boran Rachathanin. Julispong Chularatana has referred to Boran as the “Lord Lieutenant of Ayutthaya’s district” during the reign of Rama V (r. 1868-1910), whose status resembles that of modern governors (Julispong Chularatana 2007: 100). The first is his map *Phaen Thi Phranakhon Sri Ayutthaya* [Map of Ayutthaya] (Phraya Boran Rachathanin 1926) (hereafter Boran’s Map). Patrick Dumon has curated an annotated version of this on his excellent website “History of Ayutthaya” (Dumon 2010).⁵ This is described by Boran in his *Athibai Phaen Thi Phranakhon Sri Ayutthaya* [Description of the Map of Ayutthaya] (hereafter APA) (Phraya Boran Rachathanin 2007 [1929]). These important textual sources have been translated and analysed by Chris Baker. His series of ground-breaking articles based on APA includes treatments of Ayutthaya’s (a) markets, trade, and manufacturing (before 1767) (Baker 2011a), and (b) defences, infrastructure, and sacred sites (Baker 2014).⁶ Arguably, Baker’s most significant contribution to clarifying

⁴Elsewhere Julispong has discussed Indo-Persian (Julispong Chularatana 2017a) and Shi’ite (Julispong Chularatana 2008) influences during the Ayutthaya period, as well as Islam’s wider impact and accommodation up to the present day (Julispong Chularatana 2017b).

⁵Dumon’s annotated version of Boran’s maps is available at: https://www.ayutthaya-history.com/Temples_Ruins_IAM_PBR.html.

⁶Baker (Baker 2011b) has also addresses the relationship of Boran’s APA with the following Thai sources: *Testimony of the Inhabitants of the Old Capital* [คำให้การชาวกรุงเก่า/Khamhaikan chao krung kao] (KCKK) (1925); *Testimony of the King Who Entered a Wat* [คำให้การขุนหลวงหาวัด/Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat] (KLHW) (Winai Pongsripian 1991); and *Testimony of the King from Wat Pradu Songtham* [คำให้การขุนหลวงวัดประดู่ทรงธรรม/Khamhaikan khun luang wat pradu songtham] (KWPS) (Winai Pongsripian 1991).

where the Muslim presence within the city was located is his careful reproduction of Boran's maps (Baker 2011a: 69, 2014: 186), on which much of my work is based.

The context of Alan Strathern's call that historians working on the Ayutthaya period need to "break out of the prism" of European sources (Strathern 2019a: 63) were comments about Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm's account of late seventeenth-century Ayutthaya in his *Safīna-ye Sulaimānī* [The Ship of Sulaiman] (Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979), which I also interact with.⁷ Although I have pointed out some European sources with severe shortcomings, adopting a wholesale policy of throwing out European bathwater runs the risk of losing some priceless babies. Next to Boran's cartographic and textual sources of Ayutthaya analysed by Baker, and the *Safīna-ye Solaymani*, the European maps most relevant to reconstructing the location of Ayutthaya's Shi'ite mosque are Engelbert Kaempfer's "working map" and "sketch map" (see figures 5 and 6) of Ayutthaya.⁸ Kaempfer (1651–1716) was a German doctor who worked for the Dutch United East India Company, or *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC). On June 7, 1690, his ship entered the Chao Phraya River, and it arrived in Ayutthaya three days later. He left the Siamese capital on July 4 for Japan (Terwiel 1989: 64). Barend Jan Terwiel provides a detailed description of Kaempfer's two maps—both of which I analyse below. Terwiel and Larry Sternstein have helpfully noted that Bellin's maps credited "Father Thomas Valgarneira (an Italian serving with the French Jesuits) who was designer and supervisor-of-construction of new fortifications erected at Ayutthaya late in the 17th century." Although Kaempfer's cartographic contributions were based on his own detailed survey of the Siamese capital, he was likely to have been aware of the cartographic contribution produced by Bellin (Terwiel and Sternstein 1990: 165). Terwiel provides reasons for Kaempfer's cartographic contributions being of "great interest and extraordinary value to the historian." His "sketch map" represents a "massive amount of work." He explored some parts of the city a second time. He subsequently "drew details on the same scale as this general working map on small rectangular pieces of paper." These were "glued on at the appropriate place, thereby blocking parts of the original sketch from our sight," on "at least nine occasions." Kaempfer's sketch map is also "replete with measurements usually indicating how many paces it took between one bridge and the next one" (Terwiel 2003: 43). Terwiel argues that whilst aboard the VOC vessel *Waalstroom en route* to Japan in July or August 1690, Kaempfer produced a tidier "working map" of Ayutthaya, which he comments is replete with "information that he himself had acquired through days of intensive study of the city" (Terwiel 2003: 43).

I have reconstructed the location of Ayutthaya's Shi'ite mosque by analysing versions of maps by both Boran and Kaempfer made available to the authour by Patrick Dumon and Chris Baker. These include Kaempfer's "working" and "sketch" maps of seventeenth-century Ayutthaya. Annotations of this cartographic material include the location of landmarks such as water gates, canals, and bridges appearing in Baker's reconstruction of Boran's work.

Growing Muslim Presence in Ayutthaya from the Sixteenth Century

Having provided details about the sources on which my reconstruction is based, and my methodological approach, in the following section I describe the growth of the Muslim presence in the former Siamese capital, which began in the sixteenth century. I have argued elsewhere that the Muslim presence in Ayutthaya is connected to the growth of Portuguese presence on the western littoral of the Bay of Bengal (Joll and Srawut Aree 2022b). Edward Van Roy's discussion of Portuguese diplomatic, military, and commercial overtures in Siam before Alfonso d'Albuquerque's invasion of Melaka in 1511 mentions that an envoy was charged with informing Siam of Portuguese plans. Almost immediately after the capture of Melaka, another Portuguese mission (which included Tomé Pires) left Goa for Ayutthaya. The mission remained in Ayutthaya for two years before returning to Goa (via Melaka) (van Roy 2017: 42). John Villiers has commented upon the inadequacies of Spanish and Portuguese accounts of Siam

⁷*Safīna-ye Solaymani* has been analysed by (Alam, Nalini, and Gaborieau 2000; Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007; Arian 2019; Allen 1991; Dhiravat na Pombajra 1984).

⁸Kaempfer's "sketch map" is fol. 429r in (Michel and Terwiel 2001: 506, 508). See also (Terwiel and Sternstein 1990: 161). His "working map" is SI 3060. fol. 428r (Michel and Terwiel 2001: 503–505). See also (Terwiel 2003: 44–45). My analysis of both these is based on versions made available to the author by Chris Baker.

penned by mercenaries, merchants, and missionaries during the sixteenth century. Many of these might be replete with “prejudices, intolerance and ignorance,” and the tendency to “distort, exaggerate and even invent” statistics. Nevertheless, none of these flaws preclude historians from being rewarded with “many valuable insights” (Villiers 1998: 119).⁹ In his well-known description of Ayutthaya in his *Suma Oriental*, Tomé Pires states that there are “very few Moors,” whom the Siamese “do not like.” Nevertheless, he mentions the presence of “Arabs, Persians, Bengalees, [and] many Kling,” along with “Chinese and other nationalities” (Pires 1944: 104). Siamese attitudes toward Muslim merchants in subsequent decades might explain Duarte Barbosa’s observation during the same decade that local Muslims were not permitted by the Siamese to bear arms (Barbosa 2010: 188). Later in the 1550s, Fernão Mendes Pinto—who Michael Pearson refers to as an “adventurer-turned-religious”—claimed that Turkish and Arab missionaries were active in Siam (Pearson 1990: 59, 68–69). Furthermore, fellow Jesuits informed Pinto that local Muslims were “doing very well.” In Ayutthaya, there were “already [...] seven mosques,” which served an estimated 30,000 local Muslims and were led by foreign religious leaders. In other words, there had been progress in local Muslim proselytization. This development was attributed—in part—to the hands-off attitude of the Siamese monarch. At the time, this was King Chairacha (r. 1534–1546) who permitted “everyone do what they want.” He reasoned that he was the king of “nothing more than their bodies” (da Silva Rego 1947: Vol. V 372). The only mosque mentioned in the secondary literature from the sixteenth century was Masjid Takia Yokin, located on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River south of the city (Joll and Srawut Aree 2022a).

Later in the early seventeenth century, both Sheikh Ahmed (d. 1631) and his brother Muhammad Sa’id arrived in Ayutthaya.¹⁰ The inscription at the tomb of Sheikh Ahmad in Ayutthaya reproduced by Majid Daneshgar (Daneshgar 2014: 196) makes a number of claims. The most important is that he arrived in Ayutthaya with his brother toward the end of the reign of King Naresuan (r. 1590–1605). During the reign of King Song Tham (r. 1610/11–1628), Sheikh Ahmad was promoted to the head of the *Krom Tha Khwa* branch of the *Phrakhlang*, receiving the title Phraya Sheikh Ahmad Rattana Rahsethee. He was also the first leader of the local Muslim community (Th. *chularajamontri*, Ar. *Sheikh al-Islam*). After helping suppress attempts by foreigners to seize the Grand Palace, he received the higher title of Chao Phraya Sheikh Ahmad Rattana Dhibodi and was appointed to a position in the Mahatthai. In the early years of the reign of King Prasat Thong (r. 1629–1656), the now elderly Sheikh Ahmad was appointed as an Emeritus Councillor for Civil Affairs, a position that came with the new title Chao Phraya Boworn Rajnayok (Daneshgar 2014: 196).

At this juncture, I note that Thai historian Bhawan Ruangsilp (who has worked on Dutch archives), commented that it was at the beginning of King Ekathotsarot’s short two-year reign in 1608 that the VOC received permission to establish a trading office in Ayutthaya. This was in a “Muslim quarter within the city walls,” before it was relocated outside the city much later, in 1645 (Bhawan Ruangsilp 2007: 42). Based on his interviews with members of the local Muslim community in Ayutthaya in early 1990s, the Japanese scholar Seiji Imanaga makes the following claims about some of the mosques built during the Ayutthaya period. Kudi Chao Sen, established by Sheikh Ahmad, was the oldest mosque inside Ayutthaya’s walled city. Imanaga assumes that it was established soon after Sheikh Ahmad’s arrival in Ayutthaya, sometime before 1606. Imanaga further argues that this mosque, once located near Sheikh Ahmad’s tomb, was named after Imam Hussein (Imanaga 1993: 6–7). There are therefore reasons for questioning Leonard Andaya’s claims that the Persian/Indo-Persian presence inside Ayutthaya’s walled city associated with Sheikh Ahmad began later during the reign of King Song Tham, who granted local Shi’ites a site that Andaya refers to as “Baan Khaek Kuti Chao Sen” (Andaya 1999: 125). This was where houses, a mosque (Th. *kuti*), and cemetery could be constructed, and Shi’ite festivals were performed (Andaya 1999: 125).¹¹

⁹Geoff Wade regards Tomé Pires’s *Suma Oriental* (Pires 1944) as “unparalleled” (Wade 2019: 118), whilst Sanjay Subrahmanyam refers to Pires as frequently “cryptic” (Subrahmanyam 2011: 141).

¹⁰For more details about Sheikh Ahmad, see (Julispong Chularatana 2004; Oudaya Bhanuwongse nd.; Pitya Bunnag 1995a, 1995b; Uthai Phanuwong 1987; van Roy 2020).

¹¹Christoph Marcinkowski also dates the establishment of the mosque and graveyard in Baan Khaek Kuti Chao Sen during the reign of King Song Tham (Marcinkowski 2015: 38).

By the 1640s, Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi, the son of Sheikh Ahmad and brother of Muhammad Sa'īd, became an associate of the future King Narai (Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit 2017: 126). In 1656, Narai's Persian ally organized "mainly Muslim groups" for his battle that placed him on the throne—where he remained until 1688 (Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit 2017). *Safine-ye Solaymani* dates mentions that this occurred during the Muslim month of Muharram (Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 94–97). Narai materialized his appreciation in a number of ways. In addition to permitting Ayutthaya's Indo-Persian allies to annually perform their "religious rites of mourning," they were also provided with "whatever they needed [...] in the way of furnishings, provisions, drinks, candles, oil lamps and a certain sum of money" (Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 77–78). Baker refers to local Persians and Indo-Persians as having prospered in a number of ways under Narai. Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi created a "new 500-strong palace guard for Narai." Baker adds that these were "mostly Muslims from India," which suggests the importance of Shi'ite connections across the Bay of Bengal (Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit 2017: 126).

First-hand Persian and European Accounts of Ayutthaya's Shi'ite Community and Mosque

The preceding section answered questions about the range of geopolitical and commercial developments during the sixteenth century contributing to Shi'a arriving in Ayutthaya. I incrementally introduce below references to Ayutthaya's Shi'ite Muslim enclave in a range of primary sources produced by Persian and European missionaries, traders, and diplomats. I begin with Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm's mention that Persian dignitaries who travelled to Siam on the *Safine-ye Solaymani* worshipped at a local mosque. It is important to note at the outset that it is not clear whether this Shi'ite mosque was located in Ayutthaya or Lopburi. Alan Strathern adds that Narai's Lopburi palace was "clearly influenced by Persian and Indian aesthetics" (See also Julispong Chularatana 2017a). Lopburi was also where Constantine Phaulkon, the well-known Greek adventurers constructed a "European style mansion house" and chapel with "gothic arches" for Christian guests were located—both of which had once been Buddhist temples (Th. *wat*) (Strathern 2019b: 22).¹² Guy Tachard comments that local Chinese and Brahman communities domiciled inside Ayutthaya also constructed religious sites (Tachard 1999: 214). In the *Safine-ye Solaymani*, we read that Narai had agreed to demolish what he referred to as a "pagan temple" that was located "in the vicinity of the royal residence." This was replaced by a "mosque with an adjoining upper court," which had been constructed in honour of the late Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi. Others analysing Persian accounts of their political, commercial, and cultural influence in Ayutthaya have pointed out that Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm's mention of Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi and his son Abdur Razzaq Gilani, but that *Safine-ye Solaymani* makes no mention of Sheikh Ahmad.

Regardless of whether this mosque was Ayutthaya's Shi'ite mosque established by Sheikh Ahmad, or a mosque in Lopburi later constructed in honour of Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi, the *Safine-ye Solaymani* mentions Persians attending local Muharram commemorations. They were also escorted to this mosque, where the local preacher "mounted the pulpit and in a loud voice cursed and mocked the infidels and idolaters."¹³ In previous years, this same preacher had "stood on an elephant" and rode about "all night long delivering sermons" (Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 77–78). The following is *Safine-ye Solaymani* description of local Muslim worship.

Following the ancient rule and the established custom, at the beginning and the end of the mosque service these Muslims would pronounce a prayer to God, the true Benefactor and Guide of the world and religion. They also prayed that God send down destruction on the enemies of the Prophet's house and that their preacher be blessed with Divine support. (Moḥammad Rabī' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 78)

¹²This was also commented upon by Alexandre Chevalier de Chaumont, who recounted that he found a "very fine Chapel, and a lodging for all those who attended me" (Chaumont 1687: 53).

¹³Christoph Marcinkowski has commented on the contempt that this Persian embassy had for all things Siamese (Marcinkowski 2006a).

These details are important for the following reasons. They refer to the Shi'ite cursing of Sunnis in Siam.¹⁴ Mention of the “enemies of the Prophet’s house” brings into focus the Shi'ite response to Sunni critiques of their devotion of direct descendants of the Prophet (Ar. *ahl al-bayt*), which Chiara Formichi and Michael Feener have referred to as *'alid* piety (Formichi and Feener 2015). This includes commemorations of the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandsons Hasan and Hussein during the month of Muharram, mentioned below. This is related to Moḥammad Rabī bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm’s interest in specifying whether the Muslims encountered by this Persian embassy were Shafi’is, Hanafis, or Shi’ites (See Moḥammad Rabī bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 47, 50, 135, 218).

Another detail about Ayutthaya’s Shi'ite community in *Safine-ye Solaymani* relates to one of the means by which it grew, which a range of European first-hand accounts also mention.

It is a fact the Siamese are not at all firm in their own religion but [...] follow the religion of their overlords. Siamese men and women will join whatever religion their employers adhere to. Thus, the Iranians who have settled in Siam and begun to raise a family, brought all their household into the fold of Islam. In the same way, the Christian community has managed to convert about five to six thousand natives to its faith. (See Moḥammad Rabī bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm 1979: 120)

As we shall see, other sources make mention of the growth of the local Muslim community through local Siamese conversion to what was specifically Shi'ite Islam, given the distinctions between these Persian/Indo-Persian “Moors” and the “Malay” community domiciled south of city. I will introduce European accounts of the Muslim presence in Ayutthaya during the seventeenth century roughly in chronological order.

I begin with Gijsbert Heeck’s (1655) account of Ayutthaya during the reign of King Prasat Thong (1629–1656), includes that he passed a “fairly broad street” that was almost “wholly inhabited by Moors and Gujaratis” (Heeck and Terwiel 2008: 61).¹⁵ The next first-hand account is by French missionary Nicolas Gervaise (1683–1686), who visited Ayutthaya during the reign of King Narai (r. 1656–1688). He describes the alarming development of Islam in Ayutthaya having sunk its roots “deeper and deeper.” This led to the French fear that Islam would become “the dominant religion.” Gervaise is one of many mentioning that the royal patronage of Islam included contributing toward “the expenses necessary to celebrate the Mohammedan feasts decently.” He also refers to Ayutthaya’s mosques (plural) being “very beautiful,” and that local Muslims “preach and pray as freely and as regularly as they do in the countries where they are masters.” The Muslim profile within the city increased annually as Muslims “[g]o in procession through town and country, accompanied by a great crowd of people who are attracted from all sides by the pomp and strangeness of the sight, and truly this ceremony is very ostentatious and should win over many Siamese who love displays and much show.” Gervaise opines that, except for a “few poor creatures who have been hired by money or who have sold themselves,” very few Siamese had “joined the Mohammedans.” Moreover, local “Malays” also constituted a “considerable proportion” of Narai’s subjects. Gervaise adds that Malays had nothing to do with these “Moors.” This was despite them (a) being fellow “Mohammedans,” who (b) had been “circumcised like the Moors,” (c) admitted the “same principles,” and (d) believed in the “same mysteries” (Gervaise 1928: 95). Near the end of Narai’s reign, Chevalier de Chaumont mentioned that a variety of Muslims were present in Ayutthaya (Chaumont 1687: 83–85).

The final European source from the end of Narai’s reign is by the French Jesuit missionary Père Tachard (d. 1712). His journal contains accounts of Shi'ite celebrations during his two years in Siam, which began in 1685. He describes local “Moors” making “great illuminations for eight days” in honour of “their Prophet Mahomet and his Son [*sic*], whose funerals they celebrated.” The festival began in the evening “before about four of the clock at night,” with a procession that more than 2000 people participated in. These carried the “figure of the tombs of those two impostors, with many symbols of a pretty neat representation, amongst others, certain great cages covered with painted cloth.” Men marched and “continually turned in cadence to the sound of drums and timbrels.” At the head of this “great confluence

¹⁴On the practice of Shi'ite cursing of Sunnis, see (Gleave 2017; Saeed 2022; Stanfield-Johnson 2004).

¹⁵Chris Baker mentions Gujaratis traders in Ayutthaya’s main port (See Baker 2011a: 58).

of people” were “three or four horses in rich trappings, and a great many people carrying several lanterns at the end of long poles, lighted all the procession.” The festival continued for “several nights,” until “five of the clock in the morning” (Tachard 1688: 214–215).

Later, during the reign of Phra Phetracha (1688–1703), Simon de la Loubère made a sketch (see [figure 3](#)) of a shisha pipe—a quintessential element of Muslim materiality—perhaps in Ayutthaya’s Muslim quarter. He comments that smoking was widespread in Ayutthaya, and Moors “draw the smoke through water, to diminish the strength thereof,” through what he refers to as a “singular instrument” (La Loubère 1691: 50).

La Loubère also wrote the following account of the Muslim presence in Ayutthaya:

Amongst the several nations, that of the *Moors* has been the best established under this reign. It once happened that the *Barcalon* was a *Moor*, probably because the King of *Siam* thought by this means better to establish his commerce, amongst the most powerful of his neighbouring princes, who do all make profession of Mahumetanism: The principal offices of the court, and of the provinces were then in the hands of the *Moors*: The King of *Siam* caused several mosques to be erected for them at his expense, and he still bears the charges of their principal festival, which they celebrate for several days together, in memory of the death of *Haly*, or of his children. The *Siameses*, which embraced the religion of the *Moors*, had the privilege of being exempted from the personal Service (La Loubère 1693: 112).

In a reference to either Aqa Muhammed Astarabadi, or (his son) Abdur Razzaq Gilani, La Loubère adds that the “*Barcalon Moor* soon experienced the inconstancy of the fortunes.” Not only did he “fall into disgrace,” and the “credit of those of his nation fell afterward into decay,” but the “considerable offices and employments were taken away from them.” Moreover, Siamese who have “turned Mahumetans” were forced to pay “in ready money for the six months service, from which they had been exempted.” He adds that their mosques—once again plural—are “remaining to them, as well as the public protection which the King of Siam gives to their religion,” before adding that this was policy for “all foreign religions.” La Loubère concludes by estimating that at the time there were “three or four thousand *Moors* at *Siam*.” He adds that there were “perhaps as many Malays” (La Loubère 1693: 112). Once more, regardless of whether these were local Persians/Indo-Persians, or Siamese converts to Shi’ism, La Loubère reiterates that the Shi’ite Moors differed from Sunni Malays. Around the same time, Engelbert Kaempfer describes entered the city through one of the water gates (which I describe below)—although he (sadly) does not specify which one this was.

The first street upon entering the city is that which runs westward along the turning of the wall. It hath the best houses, amongst which are those, that formerly belonged to the English, Dutch, and French, as also that in which Faulcon resided. The middle street, which runs north towards the Court, is best inhabited, and full of shops of tradesmen, artificers, and handicraftmen. In both these streets are seen above one hundred houses belonging to the Chinese, Hindostanians, and Moors, as they call them. They are all built alike of stone, very small, being but eight paces in length, four in breadth and of two Stones, yet not above two fathoms and a half high. They are covered with flat tiles, and have large doors without any proportion (Kaempfer 1906: 44).

By the end of the following section—that brings these first-hand written accounts into dialogue with Thai and Dutch cartographic sources—the location of some of these sites will become clear.

Cartographic Descriptions of Ayutthaya’s Shi’ite Mosque

The first site of interest at this juncture in [figure 4](#), is Ayutthaya’s “Great Khaek Village” that Baker describes as a “major Indian settlement” located approximately one kilometre south of the palace (via the Chakrai Noi Canal, included in [figure 1](#)). This is farther east of Coronelli’s Muslim enclave (shown in [figure 2](#)). The presence of a mixture of Hindu and Muslim *khaek* from the Indian subcontinent explains the presence of a “Brahman shrine close to the Great Swing” (Baker 2011a: 42). Julispong Chularatana comments that during the Ayutthaya period, the Siamese referred to Muslims as *khaek thet*, *khaek yai*, or *khaek chao sen*. The latter specifically denoted Shi’ites. These Thai ethnonyms related

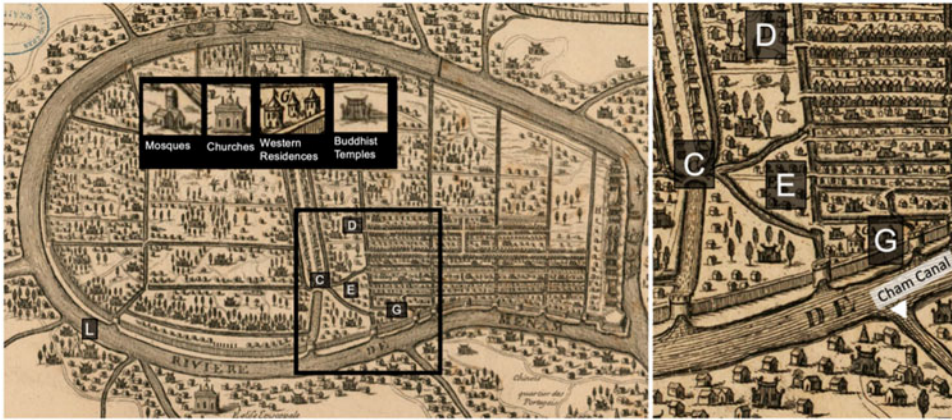


Figure 2. Location of Rue de Palais (C), Rue des Orpheures [Goldsmiths Street] (D), Quartier des Maures [sic] (E), and Quartier des Francois (G) within the walled city in Coronelli's *Siam, ô India*. A legend to Coronelli's architectural tropes is included (top left), and a more detailed version of sites C-G and the Cham Canal (left).

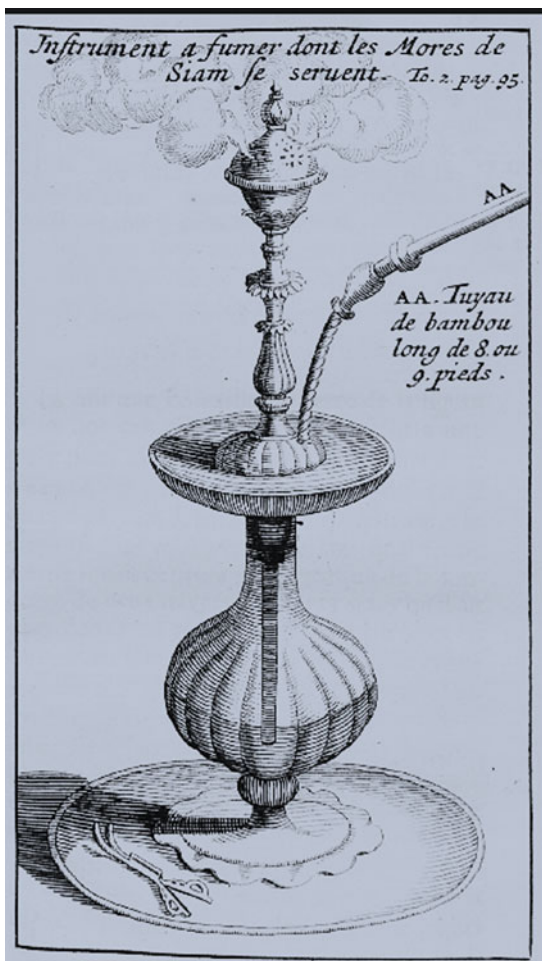


Figure 3. Simon de la Loubère's sketch of Muslim shisha pipe (La Loubère 1691: 95)

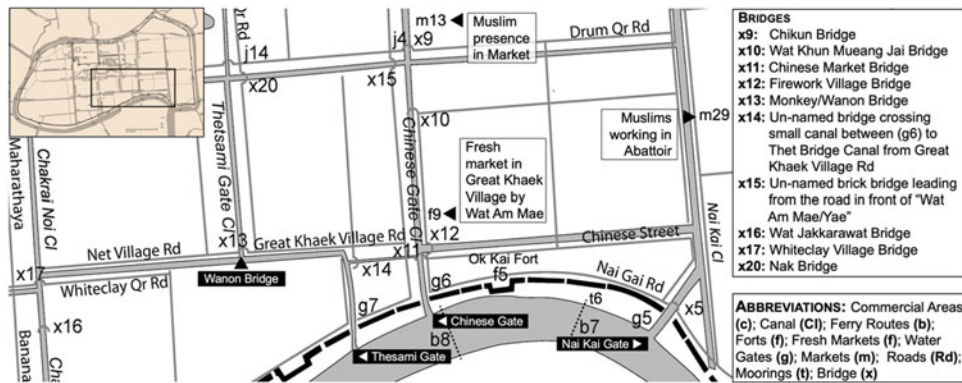


Figure 4. Annotated portion of Chris Baker's reconstruction of Boran's map (original in top lefthand corner) locating important landmarks (water gates, canals, and bridges) and sites mentioning the Muslim presence in markets (Based on Baker 2011: 69)

to toponyms inside the city such as Ban Khaek Yai Chao Sen, Pratu Thet Canal, and the street Thanon Ban Khaek Yai. He also suggest that present-day Shikun Street is a Thai corruption of "Sheikh Street" (Julispong Chularatana 2007: 45).

To the west of Great Khaek Village Road was Net Village Road. This could be accessed by both road (via the Monkey/Wanon Bridge, x13 in figure 4), and boat via either the Thesami or Chakrai Noi Canals. The latter was located north of the confluence of the Cham Canal and the Chao Phraya River, on its northern bank. Ayutthaya's network of roads, bridges, canals, and water gates connected Great Khaek Village with Chinese Street, to its east. Julispong Chularatana writes that the remains of some of the fifteen brick bridges shown in *APA* still survive. He refers to Great Khaek Village Jaosen Road crossing both the Thesami and Wanon Bridges and writes that Ayutthaya's "Indo-Persian quarter" was close to the Wanon Bridge (see figure 9). These bridges were constructed with "pointed arches to allow the passage of boats," and both the "shape and building technique" of these bridges "resemble old bridges from Persia" (Julispong Chularatana 2017a: 57).¹⁶

The first market in Boran's description of his map mentioning Muslim involvement in manufacturing and commerce, was m13 (in figure 4) to the east of the Chinese Gate Canal. This was where *khaek* shops sold "wrist and ankle bangles, hairpins, rings, *maklam* head rings, *luk kaeo* rings, bead rings, and all kinds of ornaments of brass and lead." The second is the Wat Nguia Khwai market (m29 in figure 4) located farther east, where Muslims (and intriguingly Buddhist Mon) slaughtered animals for local consumption. The third is a fresh market close to Great Khaek Village (f9 in figure 4). As mentioned, Julispong Chularatana referred to this as Ayutthaya "Indo-Iranian quarter," but he locates this farther to the west than Boran does in his maps. Note that m13 and m29 in figure 4 are the only mention of the Muslim presence inside the city in the vicinity of Bellin's *Rue des Maures*.

Boran's map and *APA* also mention Wat Chat-Than Bridge (x15 in figure 4). This was a brick bridge that led from the road in front of Wat Am Yae. A map produced by Thailand's Fine Arts Department (hereafter *FAD*) refers to a site in the vicinity of Wat Am Yae as Wat Am Mae, leading Baker to assume that *FAD* is based on Boran's map.¹⁷ Wat Am Mae is located south of this road at the end of Great Khaek Village Jaosen Road onto the main road in front of Wat Chat-Than. For Baker, Wat Am Mae/Yae may not have been a Buddhist temple, as its name is "difficult to interpret as Thai." This *wat* may have been a mosque whose name was a Thai corruption of "Ahmed" (Baker 2014: 200).

Figure 5 is based on Patrick Dumon's analysis of Boran's map. How might this reference to mosques in Thai sources as *wats* be explained? In my analysis, the Tok Takia Mosque located on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River is referred to in Boran's *APA* as Wat Khaek Takia. Furthermore, it had once been a Buddhist temple (Joll 2017, Joll and Srawut Aree 2022a). In present-day Thailand, mosques are also referred to as *wat*, as these are sites of (Islamic) worship that resemble the function of Buddhist temples.

¹⁶Pictures of these Persian bridges are provided by Baker (See Baker 2014: 198).

¹⁷Email with Chris Baker, 10 September 2022.

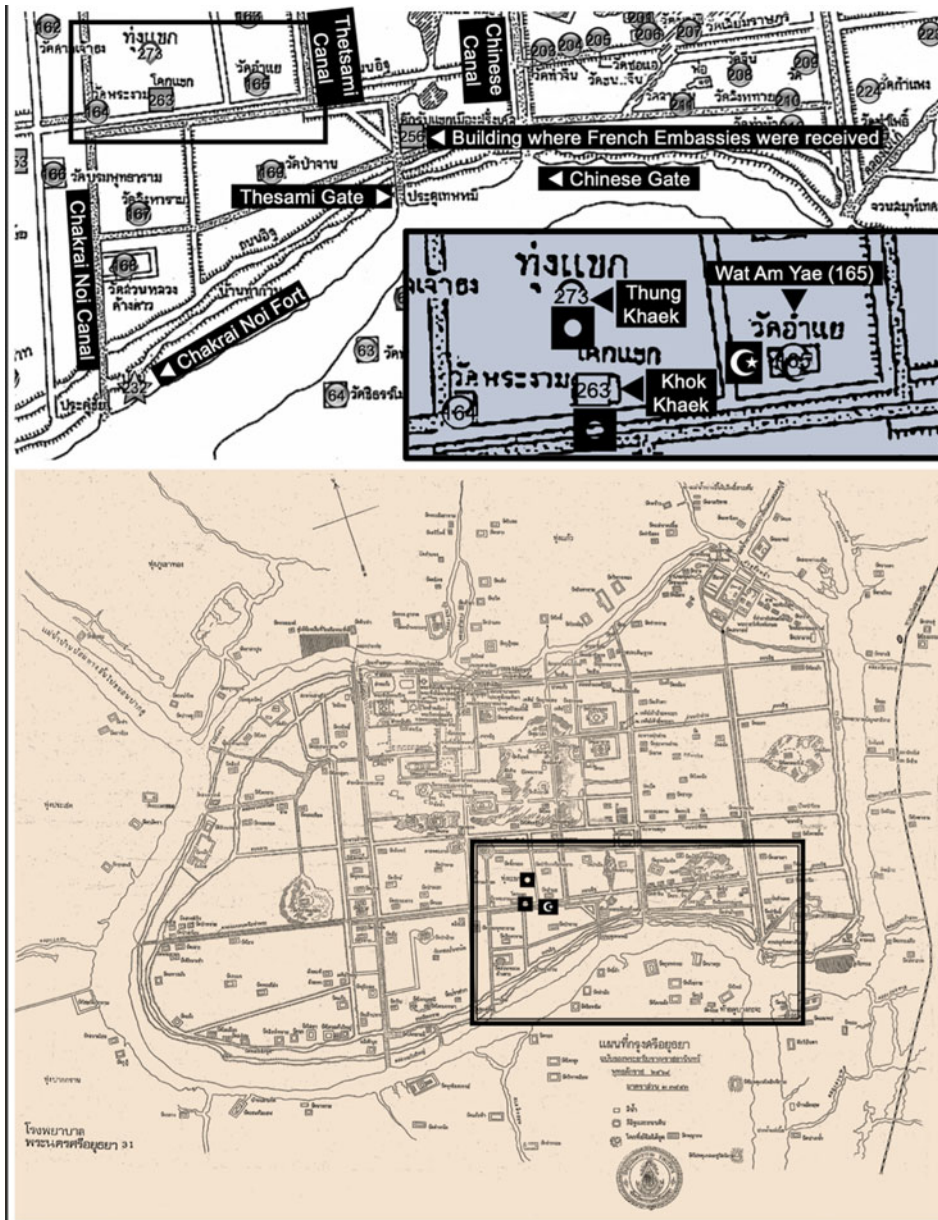


Figure 5. Annotated portions of Boran's map (original below) and Patrick Dumon's analysis highlighting the location of Wat Am Yae, Khok Khaek, and Thung Khaek.¹⁸

Some short comments about Muslim mounts (Th. *khok khaek*), and Muslim fields (Th. *thung khaek*) in figure 5 are in order. I assume that the former refers to a piece of higher ground that permanent dwellings might have been built on, as the higher ground might have prevented the buildings from being flooded during the monsoon rains that annually inundated the Siamese capital. Although I will cite sources mentioning a graveyard in Ayutthaya's Shi'ite Muslim enclave near Wat Am Yae/Mae, throughout the Muslim world, flat land adjacent to mosques regardless of their sectarian affiliation was required during congregational prayers, weekly Friday (*juma'at*) prayers, annual festivals associated with the Haj, and the end of the annual fast month of Ramadan.

¹⁸Based on https://www.ayutthaya-history.com/Temples_Ruins_IAM_PBR.html.

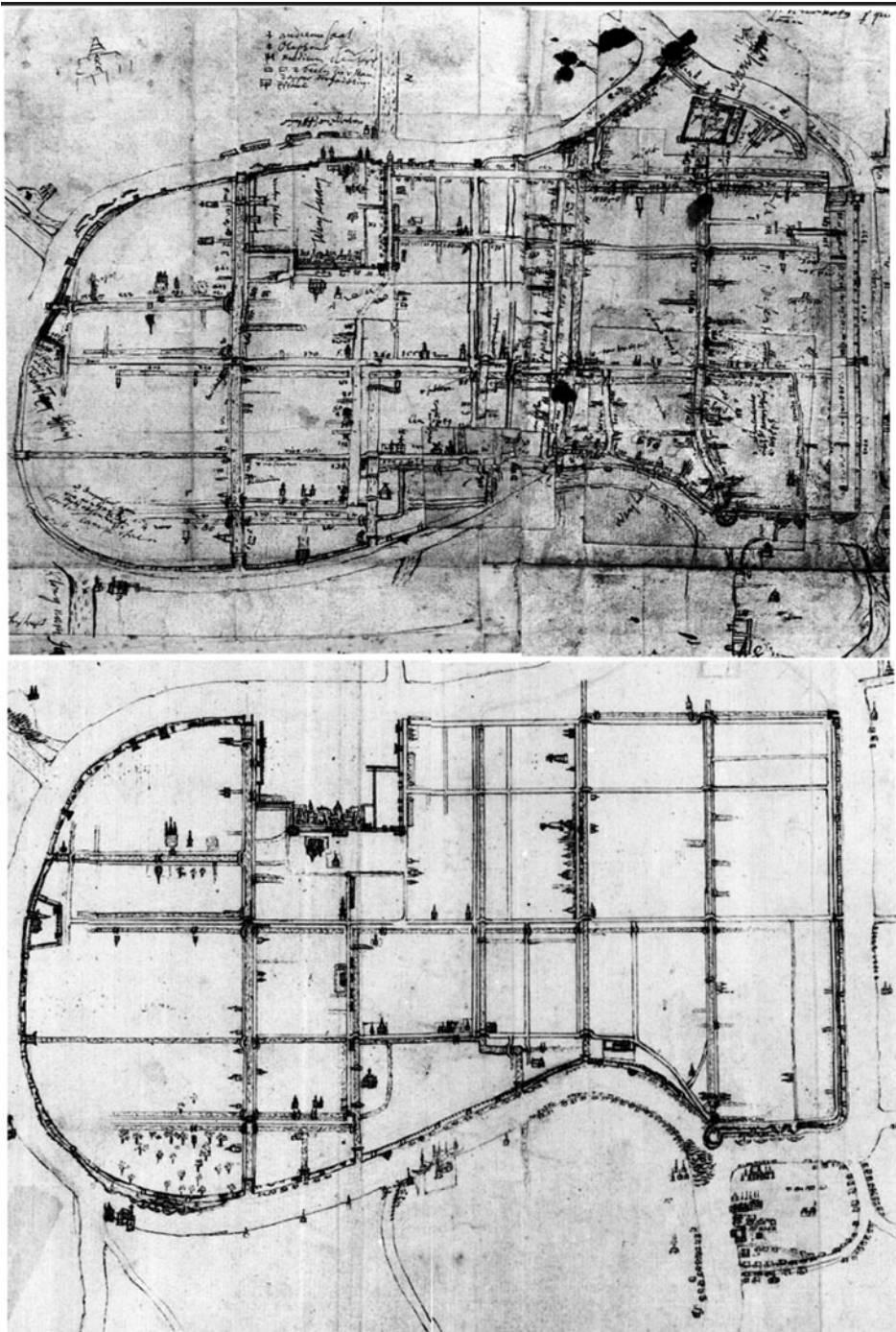


Figure 6. Juxtaposition of Engelbert Kaempfer’s “Sketch map” (above) and “working map” (below).

Boran might have included the location of a mosque in Ayutthaya’s Great Khaek Village, but apart from the FAD’s map—which may have been based on Boran’s map—is this mentioned in any other cartographic sources? Baker points out that Kaempfer’s sketch map includes a “symbol surmounted by a crescent,” which might possibly represent this mosque (Baker 2014: 200). This detail is absent in Kaempfer’s tidier “working map,” which includes the location of Ayutthaya’s water gates, canals,

roads, and bridges. I have juxtaposed these two maps in Figure 6. Figure 7 reproduces relevant portions of Kaempfer's maps, to which I have included the names of water gates, canals, and bridges.

The most important detail included by Kaempfer in his sketch map—which I have highlighted in the insert in the top lefthand corner of Figure 7—is the Muslim crescent mentioned by Baker. Figure 8 summarises the sources curated above. Despite minor differences about the precise location of this mosque and whether it was referred to as Wat Am Mae or Wat Am Yae, there is agreement that it was located on Great Khaek Village Road, between the Thesami and Chakrai Noi Canals, west of the Wanon Bridge.

Figure 9 is based on screenshots I obtained from Google Maps highlighting the proximity of the Wanon Bridge to the shrine of Sheikh Ahmad located within the campus of the Ayutthaya's Rajabhat University. Oudaya Bhanuwongse relates that although this site in the south-eastern part of the city close to the Chao Phraya River was assumed to be barren ground. However, once work began on construction site, foundations of historic buildings were discovered. This was after “bulldozers, tractors, and gangs of labourers” began work. Construction was halted after those involved in the project were incapacitated by a mysterious fever. Investigations into the history of this construction site concluded that this was the location of Sheikh Ahmad's first *kuti* (mosque), cemetery, and original residence. Members of the local Shi'ite community were subsequently invited to locate the graves of Sheikh Ahmad (d. 1631) and his (many) descendants. This eventually led to the construction of a tomb for Sheikh Ahmad, and the decision not to construct any buildings over this historical burial site (Oudaya Bhanuwongse [nd.](#)).

Following my documentation of the inadequacies of extant descriptions of Ayutthaya's Muslim enclave, this section has reconstructed the location of Ayutthaya's Shi'ite mosque mentioned in the most reliable Siamese and European cartographic sources. I have curated Boran's map and his description (in *APA*), which have been translated and discussed by Baker. The only mosque mentioned in these

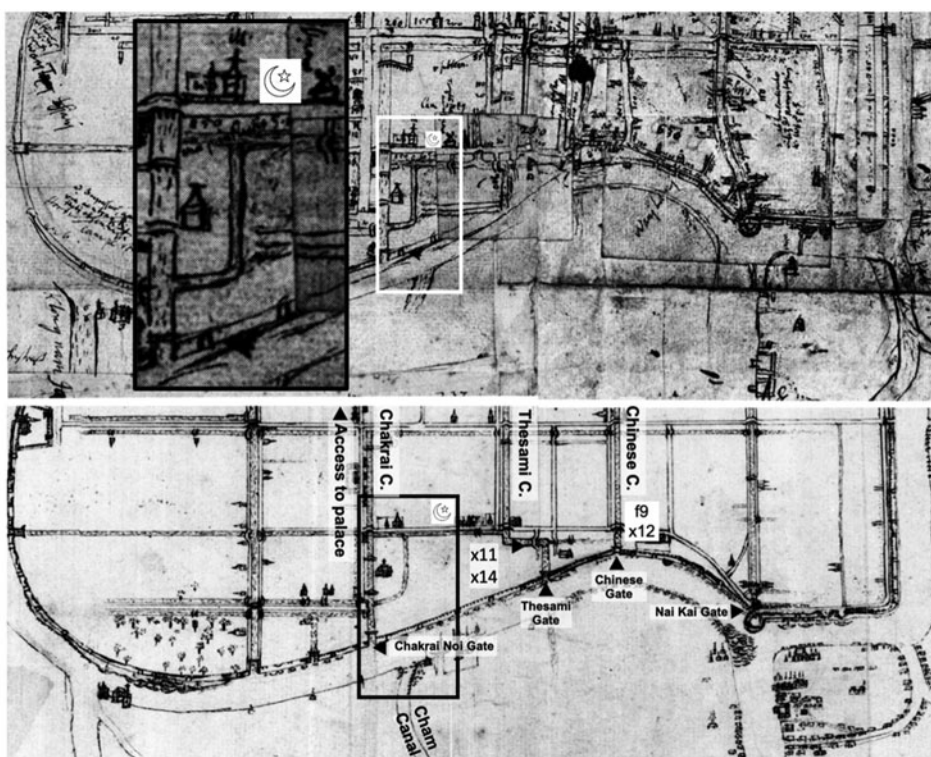


Figure 7. Author's juxtaposition of relevant portions of Kaempfer's original "sketch map" (above) and "working map" (below). The latter has been annotated with some of the most important sites included in Boran's map. The location of the building between the Chakrai and Thesami Canals that Kaempfer identified with a Muslim crescent is highlighted in the insert in the top lefthand corner.

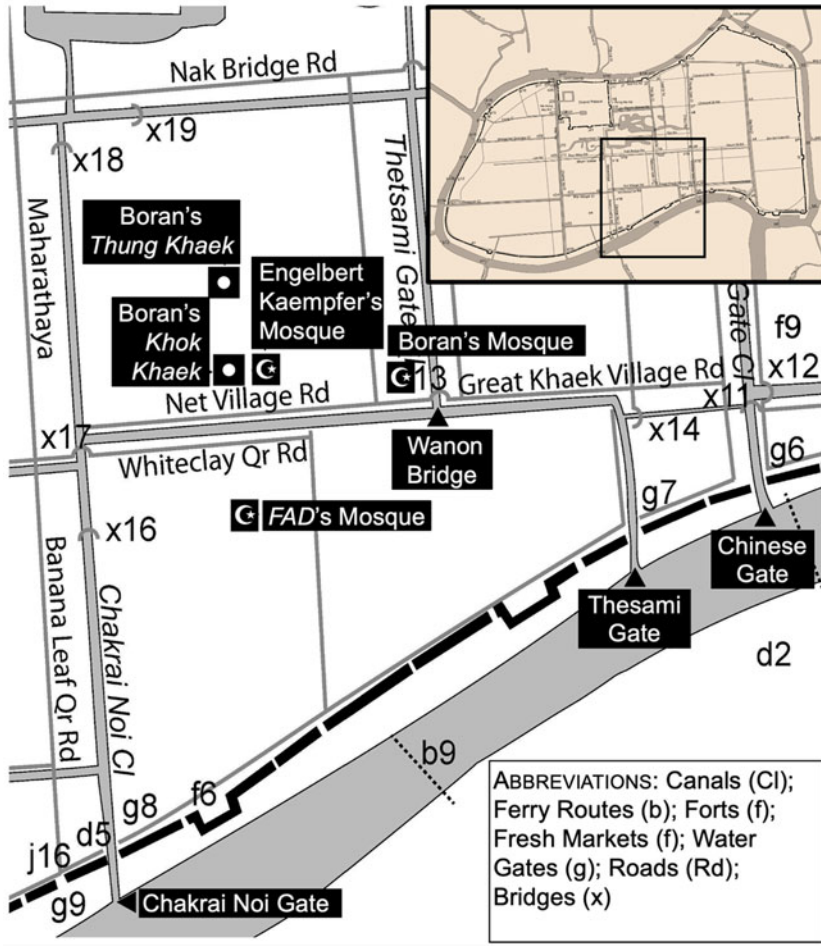


Figure 8. References to Wat Am Mae/Yae, Khok Khaek, and Thung Khaek, in Kaempfer's sketch map, Boran's map, and the FAD's map (map prepared by the author).

sources was located along Net Village Road, just west of Great Khaek Village across the Wanon Bridge. This mosque is referred to by Boran as a *wat*, which might be explained by its having once been a Buddhist temple (like the Tok Takia Mosque) or a Muslim religious site that local Buddhists refer to as a *wat* where Muslims worshipped. One of the names for this Muslim *wat* appears to have been a Thai corruption of the word “Ahmad.” Close to this mosque along Net Village Road was a mount (Th. *khok*) where permanent houses were built. This was near to a field (Th. *thung*) that would have been used for weekly Friday congregational prayers and when Muslim festivals (included those described below) were celebrated. I have documented areas of disagreement between these sources. Boran's map and FAD disagree on the name of this mosque and its precise location. Nevertheless, Boran's map and Kaempfer's “sketch map” are in general agreement about the location of this mosque, west of the Wanon Bridge along Net Village Road between the Chakrai Noi and Thesami Canals. This section concluded with a reminder about the proximity of Sheikh Ahmad's shrine to the remains of this bridge in present-day Ayutthaya.

Conclusion

This article began by demonstrating ways that European cartography continues to cast a lamentably long shadow over historians interacting with once hard-to-come-by maps made available by the explosion of



Figure 9. Google Earth screenshots highlighting the proximity of Sheikh Ahmad's shrine to the Wanon Bridge in present-day Ayutthaya.

digital information, in recent decades. My reconstruction of the specifically Shi'ite Muslim presence within Ayutthaya's walled city began by discrediting previous attempts based on Bellin's 1687 map that failed to include the location of his "Moor Street" mentioned in his legend. I have curated a detailed analysis of what I regard as the most important Siamese and European sources specifically mentioning both Ayutthaya's Muslim community, referred to by Phraya Boran Rachathanin as Great Khaek Village, and its Wat Am Yae/Mae mosque, whose name Baker has suggested represents a Siamese corruption of the word "Ahmad." Writing up this research would not have been possible without the diligent work undertaken by Julispong Chularatana, Patrick Dumon, and Chris Baker on these cartographic sources that I have curated. By doing so, I have shed enough light to dispel some uncertainties under which fellow Thai studies and Muslim studies specialists have been forced to work under.

I have also sought to do more than merely answer questions about location of this Muslim enclave in Ayutthaya's Great Khaek Village. Despite the presence of Persians having been mentioned by Tomé Pires in 1511 and other Portuguese sources from the mid-sixteenth century as a growing Muslim presence, I have shown why this Muslim enclave should be associated the Sheikh Ahmad. His arrival at the end of the reign of King Naresuan (r. 1590-1605) discredits assertions by Leonard Andaya and Christoph Marcinkowski, who have dated these developments during the reign of King Ekathotsarot (r. 1608-1610/11). I have cited a number of European sources describing Muslim presence in Ayutthaya during the reigns of King Songtham (r. 1610/11-1628), and King Narai (r. 1656-1688). Moḥammad Rabī bin

Moḥammad Ibrāhīm's account was penned before the rise of King Phra Phetracha (in 1688). This was around the time that Simon de la Loubère and Engelbert Kaempfer wrote their accounts.

Some of my findings develop arguments made elsewhere about Ayutthaya's Tok Takia Complex south of the city. This is the earliest example of a Buddhist temple being converted into a mosque following its abbot's conversion to Islam following his interactions with a Indian Sufi Sheikh from present-day Tamil Nadu, who would come to be known as Tok Takia (Joll 2017, Joll and Srawut Aree 2022a). Wat Am Mae/Yae, located in Ayutthaya's Great Khaek Village, is the only mosque within Ayutthaya's walled city mentioned in primary sources. I have noted that a range of Siamese monarchs provided places of worship for Muslims and Christians domiciled both inside and outside the city—including in Lopburi. These appear to have been a mixture of converted *wats* and new structures. In addition to this, what we now refer to as “freedom of religion” was also provided to local Hindus and Chinese. These details call into question claims by David Morgan and Anthony Reid, who have argued that between 1540 and 1640 Asia's religious diversity developed through a combination of “Thai Buddhist, Malabari Hindu, Chinese Confucian or European” port rulers possessing neither the “legitimacy to impose uniformity” on their Muslim subjects—nor any “interest in doing so” (Morgan and Reid 2010: 12–13). I also contend with Reid's assertion that in Ayutthaya most converts to Islam were “almost exclusively” from the city's diverse diaspora communities, and that tight connections between Siamese monarchs and the Buddhist sangha made “conversions out of this mainstream very rare” (Reid 2007: 6). Both European and Persian accounts from the seventeenth century refer to Buddhist conversion to Islam. That said, these appear to have been related to the privileges associated with joining Ayutthaya's “Moor” minority, which appears to have differed from the mostly Malay—and Sunni—Muslims who were domiciled outside Ayutthaya's walled city.

The final conclusion of my reassessment of the specifically Shi'ite Muslim presence in Ayutthaya during the seventeenth century concerns the relationship between Shi'ites and Sunnis during this period. Although Ayutthaya's Muslim enclave *south* of the city will be a subject I will deal with elsewhere, a number of European sources mention the privileges associated with conversion to Shi'ism, as Shi'ites assisted Siamese monarchs in their succession battles. For instance, Gervais specifically mentions that despite Malays being “Mohammedans,” they had nothing to do with the “Moors” domiciled inside the city (Gervaise 1928: 95). Moḥammad Rabi' bin Moḥammad Ibrāhīm's account of worship at a local Shi'a mosque details its cursing of Sunni rejection of Shi'ite devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*—the most important of which are the martyred grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad.

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