

SIAMESE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: THE FRENCH HISTORICAL ARCHIVES RECORDED DURING THE REIGN OF KING NARAI THE GREAT

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Abstract

As the site of Siam's first interaction with the Europeans, Ayutthaya is regarded as having an open social scheme. As seen by the journey made by the French ambassadors to the court in Ayutthaya under King Narai (Narayana), the Siamese court dedicated itself to developing foreign affairs. Thus, this cultivated the historical source of information that enables us to go in time to comprehend a variety of phenomena from the observant, curious, comparative, critical, and anecdotal habits of those Europeans. Using the recorders' understanding, this revealed the existence and function of Siamese music, which is still relatively limited.

In total, the study assessed 82 books, covering the French annals from 1656 to 1688 as well as the English and Thai translations. Based on critical analysis in organology and historical ethnomusicology, the musical instruments and their roles in the Siamese court were studied. Additionally, the refinement of errors caused by translations across languages, cultural perspectives, expertise, and time was also accomplished by integrating additional modern sources. According to the primary records of 20 books published in French, percussive-ideophone and membranophone instruments were the most frequently cited, followed by aerophones and chordophones, respectively. The music was mostly utilized as fanfare during ceremonies, such as social ceremonies, royal ceremonies held in honor of the king, honoring ceremonies for important people, and Siamese entertainment activities. The results provide an ontological approach to coming closer to reality. Consequently, evidence of Siamese music during the Ayutthaya period was generated and refined.

Keywords

Siamese musical instrument, Historical archive, French ambassador, King Narai, Siamese music

INTRODUCTION

A study of archival evidence recorded by French visitors who arrived in Ayutthaya between 1656 and 1688 in the kingdom of King Narai the Great (1656–1688). As a result of the French ambassador's observant, skeptical, comparative, and critical personality, they recorded and conveyed the story in detail based on their perspective and experience. Many aspects of Siamese society in Ayutthaya – including politics, government, economy, diplomacy, trade, religion, society, traditions, arts and culture, and entertainment activities – were described and then have become a great contribution to knowledge.

Among the various fields of information, the music in various aspects was described, including activities, ceremonies, musical instruments, musicians, or the use of music in the social and cultural context of the royal court. Also, a critique of music's worldview has prominently appeared and been mentioned.

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The current status of information in this topic, according to historical scholars, social science, and the field of music has been previously studied until these days. The 15 documents in which 14 names of authors were mentioned were collected from general historians. The list of authors includes 1) Jacques de Bourge, 2) François Pallu, 3) Guy Tachard, 4) Chevalier de Chaumont, 5) Nicolas Gervaise, 6) Simon de La Loubère, 7) Desfarges, 8) Vollant des Verquains, 9) Le Blanc Marcel, 10) François Timoleon de Choisy, 11) Claude de Forbin, 12) Fonteney, 13) Claude de Bèze, and 14) Joachim Bouvet (Khachon Sukphanit, 1980)..

The field of social sciences has collected 36 copies of documents in which 21 additional names excluding from a field of historical scholars have been found, including 1) Pierre Davity, 2) Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, 3) Pierre Lambert de la Motte, 4) Claude de l'Isle, 5) Bénigne Vachet, 6) Jean Donneau de Vizé, 7) Robert Challe, 8) Claude Cebéret, 9) De la Touche, 10) Thomas Goüye, 11) Beauchamp, 12) Véret, 13) Sint Vandrill, 14) Pierre-Joseph d'Orléans, 15) Louis Laneau, 16) Adrien Launay, 17) Anonymous (Relation des missions des Eve...), 18) Anonymous (Relation des missions et des voyages...), 19) Anonymous (Relation de ce qui s'est passé...), 20) Anonymous (A European version of the revolution in Siam...), and 21) Anonymous (A Full and True Relation of the great and wonderful...) (Pridi Phitphumwithi, 2015).

The music scholars trained by Terry E. Miller and Charoenchai Chonpairot focused on the documents recorded during the time from 1657 to 1688, which was King Narai the Great's reign. A record document having seven recorders' name provides in-depth music aspects. The list includes 1) Chevalier de Chaumont, 2) Guy Tachard, 3) François Timoleon de Choisy, 4) Nicolas Gervaise, 5) Simon de La Loubère, 6) Claude de Forbin, and 7) Joachim Bouvet (Terry E. Miller and Jarernchai Chonpairot, 1994).

Two additional new recorders were discovered for this study, which is considered fresh in this field, namely 1) the archives of Monsieur Lucien Lanier and 2) Fonteney's archives.

Therefore, a total of 38 copies have been discovered, comprising 33 documents with the name of the authors and only 5 documents which are anonymous.

With the restriction and inadequacy of music information from the Ayutthaya period, this study as a view of historical ethnomusicology will therefore be reinforced more effectively if further new empirical evidence is found in other sources. It is clear that the majority of archives was written based on an "etic" perspective of cultural outsiders with knowledge, attitude, or even bias which is intentional or unintentional among European visitors. Also, it was recorded in the distant past, more than three centuries ago. Overall, making careful use of facts to create a space for constructive criticism is beneficial to scholar work in music.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The main objective is to examine information regarding musical instruments found in French archives during King Narai the Great's reign.

1. Data management of 82 copies of primary historical documents recorded in French, including English and Thai translations.

2. Methodologies of analysis and criticism in historical ethnomusicology, regarding Thai music theory and practice.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this study can be divided into three aspects: 1) the number of archival documents, 2) the instrument information found in the archives, and 3) the roles and functions of the music as the following details.

RESULT 1 THE NUMBER OF ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Recording information from various ambassadors who visited Siam for contributing relationship between the two countries. Information about Siamese, Siamese society, and Siamese arts and culture in the reign of King Narai the Great was recorded as historical archive. The 20 documents were found including a list of 18 French recorders (some with more than 1 copy) as listed.

Year	French recordists	Year	French recordists
1660	Pierre Davity	1688	Nicolas Gervaise
1666	Jacques de Bourge	1688	Robert Challe
1668	François Pallu	1688	De la Touche
1681	Jean-Baptise Tavernier	1689	Guy Tachard
1684	Claude de l'Isle	1689	ไม่ปรากฏนามผู้บันทึก
1686	Chevalier de Chaumont	1691	Simon de La Loubère
1686	Guy Tachard	1748	Claude de Forbin
1687	François Timoleon de Choisy	1883	Monsieur Lucien Lanier
1687	François Timoleon de Choisy	1920	Adrien Launay
1688	Claude Céberet	1963	Joachim Bouvet

Figure 1: Table overview of recordists.

RESULT 2 THE INSTRUMENT INFORMATION FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES

The ambassadors identified by their names recorded various information regarding the musical instruments of the Siamese people along with critical analysis. Although some descriptions and contents do not cover the entire facts of current Thai music, such information can help understand the important role music plays in the society. Thus, Siamese musical instruments were described in different aspects covering their physical appearance and use and function of them according to various social activities. Various types of musical instruments with a variety of roles can be classified into four groups: percussion, wind, leather, and string according to the Hornbostel–Sachs classification.

GROUP OF PERCUSSIVE INSTRUMENTS

Seven types, including *rakhang* (bell), gong (*mong* (suspended gong), *meng*-suspended gong, and *khong chai* large-suspended gong), 4) *chap* (cymbal), 5) *mahorathuek* (metal drum) 6) *ching* (a pair of small cups rattled and sounding like a cymbal), and 7) *krap* (wooden crap). These are divided into three groups.

GROUP 1 A GROUP OF RHYTHMIC PERCUSSION

This is separated into two, namely metal and wood instruments.

FOR EXAMPLE:

The krap: According to Simon de La Loubère's record, a "crab" is assumed to be the "krap" that appears in Thai musical culture to the present. As the word appears in the French version of the archives, "Du Royaume de Siam" corresponds to the word "deux bâtons courts" (meaning two short pieces of wood) as the message describes:

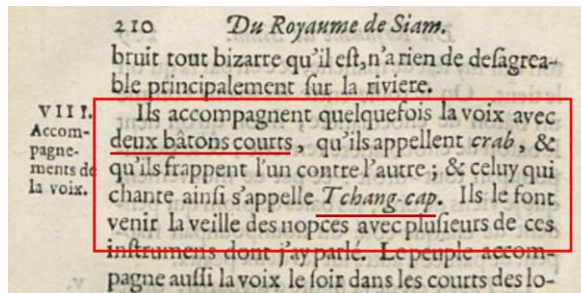


Figure 2: Simon de La Loubère (1691)

GROUP 2 A GROUP OF PERCUSSION FOR SIGNALING

This comprises five different types, namely gong (mong, khong chai), ching (a pair of cup cymbals), *chap* (cymbal), *mahorathuek* (metal drum), and *rakhang* (bell).

EXAMPLE

The following details are provided regarding the phrases "Schoung Schang" [Thai document pronounced "Chong Chang"] and "Cong" from original French records together with a drawing of a gong (Cong) made by Simon de La Loubère:

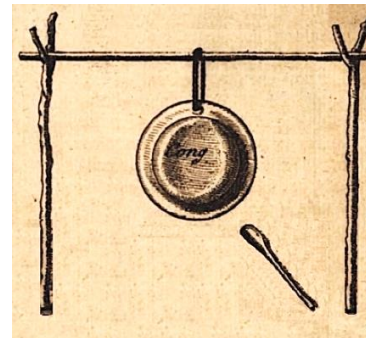
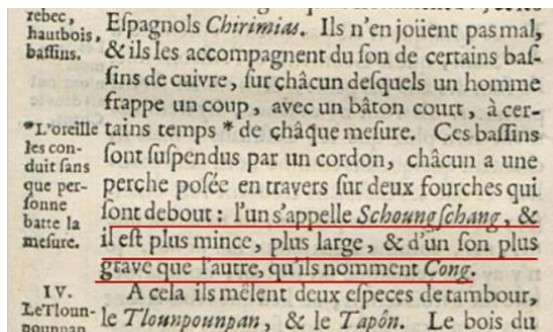


Figure 3a and b: Simon de La Loubère (1691); Simon de La Loubère (1691)

The word 'cloches' appears in French documents.

Il y avoit beaucoup d'instrumens, comme des Trompettes, Tambours, Timbales, Mufettes, des manieres de petites cloches, & de petits cors, dont le bruit ressembloit à ceux des pasteurs en France. Toute cette Musique faisoit assez de bruit; nous marchâmes de cette façon le long d'une grande rue bordée des

du troisieme jour, on met le corps dans un cercueil peint & doré; on ne l'enveloit point, on jette seulement une natte dessous, & on le couvre de ses habits; ensuite les Talapoins du Pagode s'assemblent, & au son des Tambours, des Fifres, des Cloches & de tous leurs autres Instrumens, les Parens & les Amis du defunt s'y trouvent en habit blanc; la Femme, & les plus proches parentes y viennent aussi dans un habit de même couleur &

(1) Dans son ouvrage sur le royaume de Siam (t. 1, 2^e partie, chap. xii), La Loubère dit que les Siamois ont pour instrumens de musique de mauvais petits rebecs ou violons à trois cordes, qu'ils appellent *trô*, des hautbois fort aigres qu'ils nomment *pi*, deux espèces de tambours, un instrument composé de timbres, le *patcong*, et pour accompagnement certains bassins de cuivre, « sur chacun desquels un homme frappe un coup, avec un bâton court, à certains temps de chaque mesure ». Ils ont aussi des trompettes, la marche sonnée à l'arrivée des ambassadeurs, et dans les cérémonies officielles, était un charivari de tous ces instrumens réunis. La Loubère (p. : 83), la qualifie « bruit de cinquante » et le Chevalier de Chaumont la compare à celle « des bassins en France » (Relation, p. 321).

Figures 4 a, b, and c: Chevalier de Chaumont (1686); Nicolas Gervaise (1688); Lucien Lanier (1883).

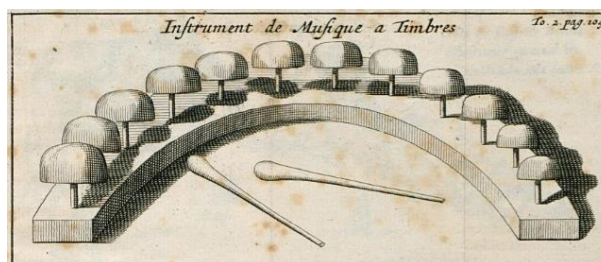
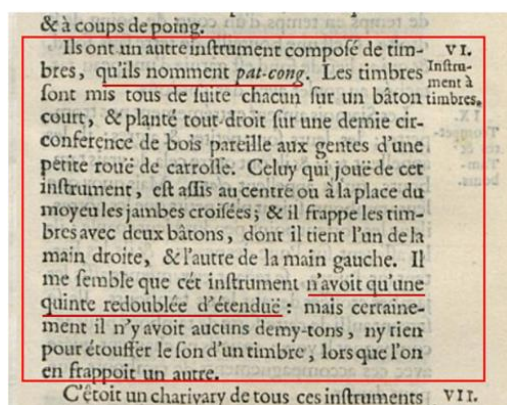
Therefore, the description of the instrument “Gong” in this section appears as a physical description and how to play it which is the same style as “Gong Mong” (a single suspended gong). The word found in the Thai translation that was translated from the French record of Simon de La Loubère includes only the use of the words “Cong” [gong] and “Schoung Schang”. The word translated into word “bell” in the English version which aligns with the French version of the original document using the word “cloches” [cloches] referring to bells in English.

GROUP 3 MELODIC IDIOPHONES

The gong which is called “Pat Cong” in the French document is considered the only percussion instrument. It is assumed to be the foundation development of the current Thai *khong wong* (a gong chime).

EXAMPLE

The name “pat-cong” of the instrument is mentioned in Roman characters in one of Simon de La Loubère’s two books. The term “pat-cong” was described further in terms of its practice, which involved striking with two short sticks, “un 9ledou court” (meaning a pair of short bats), and the tuning scale appeared only five notes, “n’avoit qu’une quinte 9ledouble d’étendue” (meaning “five sound”).



Figures 5 a and b: (above) Simon de La Loubère (1691); (below) Simon de La Loubère (1691)

Therefore, information about the characteristics of the gong chime comprising 12 kettle gongs named “pat cong” is very useful for explaining the derivation and development of the specific instrument during the 12th–13th centuries in the Prasat Angkor Wat and Sukhothai eras, which have continued to develop into the present day known as Thai *khong wong yai* or Khmer *khong vong thom*.

GROUP 4 OF WIND INSTRUMENTS

This group includes six types: horn, sangkha (choch shell), trae ngon, trae fun fa, shawm, and flute. The wind instruments found can be categorized into three groups as follows:

- Group 1 Horn or shell wind instrument
- Group 2 Metal wind instrument
- Group 3 Woodwind instrument

Additionally, a variety of instrument’s names was discovered in the documents as follows:

Thai Documents	English Documents	French Documents
เขา (animal horn)	horn	<i>trompette</i>
สังข์ (<i>shankha</i> or conch shell)	pipes	<i>hautbois</i>
แตรงอน (curved horn)	flutes	<i>musette</i>
แตรลำโพง (horn with bell end)	trumpet	<i>cornet</i>
ปี่ (shawm)	<i>tré</i>	<i>cors</i>
ขลุ่ย (flute)	-	<i>fifres</i>
		<i>pi</i>

Figure 6: Table showing another comparison of terms in various documents.

It can be concluded that the naming of wind instruments that appear in most archives does not specify the name of the instrument, but only specifies the characteristics, just to distinguish different wind instruments. It is also observed that **a metal wind instrument** with the word “trumpet” is the only instrument found to have a clear name, as well as an analogy to the musical instrument in European culture, the trumpet. It denotes a trumpet that plays as a sign of respect for the King. However, descriptions of the word "trumpet" from some documents compare the sound of the trumpet to that of a farmer and shepherd's blow.

Two types of woodwind instrument found are an oboe and a flute. Therefore, the description of words in the French version varies according to individual views. Furthermore, a description is perhaps based on the background of each recorder trying to convey as much as possible the unique characteristics of these instruments as we can see from the use of the word "pi" as follows:

French ambassador name	English version	French version
Simon de La Loubère	pi	pi
Monsieur Lucien Lanier	oboe	hautbois musettes
Nicolas Gervaise	pipe	fifres

Figure 7: Table showing a continuing comparison of terms in various documents.

The orthography of the word "flute" is part of the information demonstrating the evolution of the term for musical instruments in Europe in the 17th century (1600–1699). The orthography of such a word corresponds to that found in the documents. In other words, the orthography of such a word corresponds to that found in the documents.

During the reign of King Narai the Great (1656–1688), the only document found is Nicolas Gervais, recorded in the word "flustes". This is an old orthography that was established in French dictionaries around 1694. Later, around 1740, this term was changed to "flûte" as current French word.

The information indicates that some wind instruments are made from natural materials, such as horns. The use of the French word to refer to a horn is "*de petits cors*". The meaning of the French word “*cor*” is equivalent to the English word “horn”.

Il y avoit beaucoup d'instrumens, comme des Trompettes, Tambours, Timbales, Mufettes, des manieres de petites cloches, & de petits cors, dont le bruit ressembloit à ceux des pasteurs en France. Toute cette Musique faisoit assez de bruit; nous marchâmes de cette façon le long d'une grande rue bordée des

Figure 8: Chevalier de Chaumont (1686).

Furthermore, in French records, information about the conch shell (*shankha*) is given using the general term "trompettes" rather than a specific name, which corresponds to the English word "trumpet". However, the context of the instrument shown helps us identify the "*shankha*" in reference to an instrument in the court music ensemble currently known as "*wong traе sang*", performed during royal ceremonies.

Group of drums: Seven types – *thon taphon*, *talungpungpang pongpang*, *klong chana*, *klong suek*, *klong song na-klong na diaw*, *tone*, and *klong yai*.

EXAMPLES

TONG

Simon de La Loubère used the term "tong" to describe a specific sort of single-headed drum known as *thon* at the present time.



Figure 9 a and b: Simon de La Loubère (1691); Simon de La Loubère (1691)

TAPÔN

Simon de La Loubère gave the drum the name "tapôn" (French pronunciation: "ta pong") based on its Siamese pronunciation in its original form (I assume). Furthermore, the shape of the musical instrument appears like a wooden barrel. In Addition, a technique for playing the instrument involves striking both sides with both hands as the message describes below:

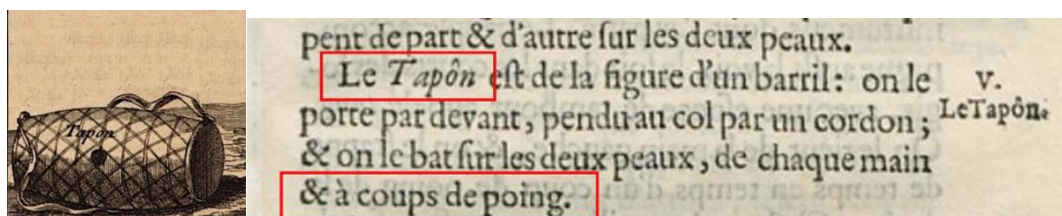


Figure 10a and b: Simon de La Loubère (1691); Simon de La Loubère (1691).

A particular sort of drum was given its French name by Simon de La Loubère, "tlounpounpàn" (which is sound in Thai "Talung Pung Pang") or "Pong Pang" found in some

of the records. The word in the message below is in French with the male prefix "le" added.

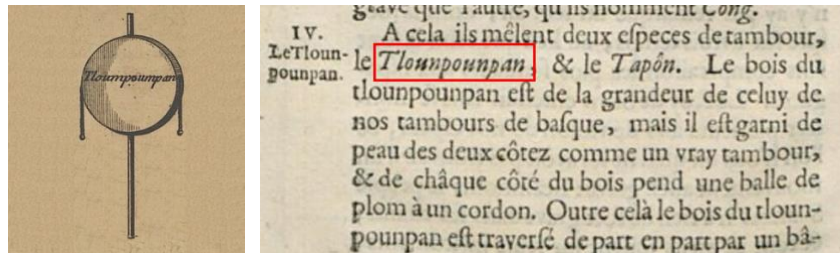


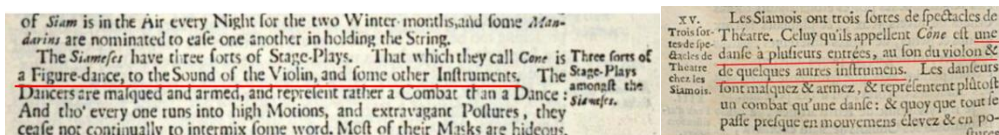
Figure 11 a and b: Simon de La Loubère (1691); Simon de La Loubère (1691)

Although their physical shape based on the drawing is very different from the contemporary Ban dao, most of the Thai experts assume that this musical instrument is the present-day "ban do." Furthermore, according to our knowledge regarding Thai music history, this instrument has never been used for the Siam royal occasion and is instead regarded as a general musical instrument for local children. Otherwise, it is possible that the instrument has been misplaced from a Thai royal court for some time.

Such a musical instrument is only known to have been used in royal events in Siamese court reflecting with ancient Siam-Khmer relations. As a result, this finding is the only information that can firmly prove the existence of the musical instrument known as "Talong Pung Pang" in the French record.

Group of stringed instruments: Four types, *so duang*, *so-u*, *so samsai*, and *krachappi* (found only in a Thai version), use the term “*du violon*” and “*de quelques autres instruments*”. The instruments mentioned here denote the current Thai fiddle, known as *so-duang* and *so-u*.

English Document → French Document



Figures 12a and b: An early manuscript (1693) compared with Simon de La Loubère (1691).

Some information identified an instrument corresponding to the current "fiddle", with characteristics and also nomenclature resembling those of the *rebeck* or violin. It consists of three strings and is called *trô* in the English translation of the text.

RESULT 3 THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE MUSIC

The musical instruments discovered were primarily used in imperial court ceremonial functions, particularly the funeral ceremony for the King and royal family. The music was represented as a significant honor for a person. In other important royal ceremonies, for example, music was used as one of the elements in the parade to welcome King Louis XIV's royal letter, which was brought in by the French ambassadors and their companions.

It represents the reception as a function of the royal court or on behalf of the King, or even using music to accompany the King's honor when he walks and appearing in public

to accomplish royal duties. Furthermore, music is represented as signals in the royal ceremonies, as well as the musical context associated with Siam's entertainment. A summary of the roles and functions of Siamese musical instruments can be summarized in five ways:

- 1) Musical instruments used in common people's ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings, and other ceremonies and traditions.
- 2) Musical instruments were used during the royal ceremony. There will be a royal funeral ceremony, a honor royal reception of a royal letter from King Louis XIV, a king's parade, a royal parade for Buddhist ceremony, death notification, and the King's visitation process as governorship.
- 3) Music for the purpose of honor or dignity.
- 4) Music for army movements or battles.
- 5) Music is a form of entertainment in Siam.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Many insights could be achieved with information from the archives about various phenomena in Siamese society in the past. It is the only important tool for understanding the Siamese people's musical culture. Even if it is only from the perspective of a foreigner. There will unavoidably be some ideas or opinions that contradict the facts. We should also acknowledge the recorder's validity in the face of significant limitations such as the method of writing material, opportunity to approach music stuff, and musical background knowledge about music theory and practice. These would unavoidably create a significant impact on the performance of the recorded data. Therefore, a critical analysis should be performed to determine the cause and background of the recorder's capability. It is a curiosity challenge to access facts that are combined with their "etic" views and worldviews.

In addition, studies of music data from this type of evidence are limited in Thai translations. In addition, there was an inconsistency of some essences arising from the translation from the source to the end of the translated versions. This could be due to linguistic differences at the time, and the subject matter is explained from a cross-cultural perspective. All of this unavoidably led to inconsistencies in information and historical facts about Thai music. As a result, there were two difficulties in determining the name of the instrument: 1) the name of the instrument in the archives was the same as the name of the current instrument; but they are different instruments, and 2) a number of instruments whose physical characteristics can be inferred to which musical instrument is currently present but are known by different names.

Therefore, this study is regarded as an extraction of music facts through the use of the music knowledge base as a data analysis tool to demonstrate the music as its appearance in cultural and social contexts as well as the outlook of Westerners who interacted with Siam at the time. This eventually leads to an explanation that can connect the essence of Siamese musical history with data from other sources.

The findings will help to support, promote, and expand the body of knowledge about the history of Thai music culture. Therefore, further investigation into this topic from various perspectives or on a larger scale is recommended.

REMARK

All depictions are provided by courtesy of the named archives.

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