

Sancian: Landscape and Architecture In the Burial Place of St Francis Xavier

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[Abstract] St Francis Xavier, died in December 1552 on Sancian Island (上川島), Guangdong Province. Even though the remote temporary burial place of Francis Xavier was symbolically important for the Catholic missions in China, it was rarely frequented by pilgrims. A memorial stone, engraved in Macau in 1639, was however erected there in 1644. In 1700, this stone became the center of a larger sanctuary staged on the slope and facing the maritime landscape, but it was soon abandoned and fell into ruins. The pilgrimages started only during the 19th Century and the church visible today still shows the date of completion as 1869, even though it has been since intensely modified. It was built together with a second church and two granite pyramids, which extended the sanctuary in the surrounding landscape. The main purpose of this article is therefore to offer reconstructed views of the lost monuments, architecture and landscaping of Sancian. These views will help us to understand how the same place and meanings prevailed in different times. These monuments were metaphors of the life and death of Francis Xavier, connecting earth and heaven, the East and the West, land and sea. They were designed to be seen from afar and from the sea. Conversely, they spare the view that overlooks China, for which St Francis Xavier forever longed to reach.

The origins of the Sanctuary

An Empty Burial Place

Francis Xavier was one of the first members of the Jesuits. Appointed as Apostolic Nuncio to the Eastern part of the still expanding Portuguese empire, he had the commitment to organize the Catholic missions in the Diocese of Goa.¹ This mission was placed under the sponsorship of the King of Portugal, a sponsorship called *Padroado*. Thus, he travelled on the Portuguese trade roads up to Japan. At the time, China closed its door to the foreigners since the confrontation of 1521 between Portuguese and Chinese in the Pearl River Estuary.² However, Sancian (now known as Shuanchuang), a coastal island 150 km from this estuary, became thereafter a stop between Malacca and Japan and a tolerated anchorage of the Portuguese where they traded with Guangzhou's merchants.³ Francis Xavier came to Sancian the first time during his return trip to Japan. Convicted while in Japan that China was the first priority for evangelizing Asia, he believed he could put an end to the ban on foreigners in China and came again to Sancian, daring to enter China and accompanied by a young Chinese named Antonio. Francis Xavier finally died on Sancian in the early morning of 2 December 1552.⁴

¹ The most complete biography of St Francis Xavier is Georg Schurhammer, S.J., *Francis Xavier, His Time, His Life*, vol. I-IV, trans. Joseph Costelloe, (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1982).

² Ronald Bishop Smith, in *The First Age of the Portuguese Navigations, Embassies and Peregrinations to the Kingdoms and Islands of Southeast Asia (1509-1521)*, (Maryland: Bethesda, 1968). See also, Pascale Girard, *Prisonniers de l'Empire Céleste. Le désastre de la première ambassade portugaise en Chine (1517-1524)* (Paris: Chandeigne, 2013).

³ Albert, Kammerer, *La Découverte de la Chine par les Portugais au XVIème Siècle et la Cartographie des Portulans*, T'oung Pao (通報), Seconde Série, vol. 39, Supplément, (Leiden: Brill, 1944). Chap. 5, "Sancian," pp.88-95.

⁴ In September 1557, Jesuit Manuel Teixeira, the first biographer of Francis Xavier, asked Antonio, the Chinese companion of Francis Xavier, for an account of his death and burial. The Spanish manuscripts of his interview

After being buried by Antonio for two and half months, his body was discovered, preserved and brought to Malacca and from there to Goa, where his preserved body is still being venerated. In Sancian, nothing of Francis Xavier remains, except the place where he was temporary buried.

The Mass Said by Nunez Barreto (1555)

The first Jesuit who visited Sancian after the death of Francis Xavier was Pedro Alcaçova. Actually, he did not go there as a pilgrim, but reached there on his way from Japan to Malacca in 1553, and he learned about the death of Francis Xavier when he arrived on the island. In 1554, two years after the attempt of Francis Xavier to enter in China, Leonel de Sousa negotiated with Wang Bo (汪柏), the Governor of Navigation in Guangdong, to legalize Portuguese trade by paying taxes. Then, the Portuguese moved their seasonal market from Sancian to Lampacau, which was closer to the Pearl River Estuary. Soon after, the Portuguese helped the Chinese to catch pirates in the estuary. As a reward, they were granted permanent settlement in Macau in 1557. Thus, Sancian was abandoned by the Portuguese, but some went there as pilgrims.

The first recorded pilgrim of Sancian was Father Melchior Nunez Barreto, who wrote in 1555: "By the great favor of the Providence, I had the joy to celebrate the sacred mysteries on the very spot where the

indicated "Saturday 3 December" as the date of death of Francis Xavier; the Portuguese manuscript indicated "Sunday 2 December." There was a mistake in both manuscripts because 2 December was actually a Tuesday and 3 December was a Wednesday. All other sources stated the date of death as 2 December. The bull of canonization mentioned that Francis Xavier died on 2 December and placed his feast day at 3 December. With respect for the date of the feast day rather than for the sources, Schurhammer defended 3 December as the date of the death. *C.f. Documenta Indica III*, pp.662-664. *Monumenta Xavierana II*, pp.791-792 and 812-814.

mortal remains of Francis Xavier had once rested.”⁵ Thus, the pilgrimage in Sancian was basically the celebration of a Mass at the burial place.

Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509-1583), author of the famous and partly fictionalized monument of Portuguese literature “Peregrinação,” was a Jesuit postulant and a friend of Nunez Barreto. He was probably not with Nunez in Sancian. However, having heard about the Mass that Nunez said in Sancian and pretending to be present, he wrote: “We went to the place where he died. The hut was invaded by bushes. We cleaned it and surrounded it with a strong barrier and a trench. At the entrance, we planted a Cross. Then Father Nunez said a solemn Mass...”⁶ Pinto said that the Mass was held at the place of the death, whereas Nunez mentioned that it was at the burial place. Furthermore, the works mentioned by Pinto were probably not done. But his description of a sanctuary bounded by an enclosure and a trench, and identified by a cross, could have been inspired by a wish of Nunez or of other Jesuits to set up such sanctuary.

Sancian as the Threshold of the Promised Land

Nunez wanted to see the burial place before entering China. He would then go to Lampacau and from there, joining Estevao de Gois

⁵ Melchior Nunez Barreto à la Société de Jésus en Europe, Canton, le 21st novembre 1555, in Antoine Faivre, *Lettres des missions du Japon* (Lyon: M.P. Rusand, 1830), p.77. “Par une insigne faveur de la Providence, j’ai eu le bonheur de célébrer les saints mystères sur le lieu même où les restes mortels de François Xavier avaient autrefois reposés.”

⁶ The *Pilgrimage* of Mendez Pinto was published in 1614. The English translation by Henry Cogan (1692) omitted the passages about Sancian and Francis Xavier. They can be read in the French translation by Bernard Figuier: *Les voyages aventureux de Fernand Méndez Pinto* (Paris, 1645), p.994. A shorter version of the same passage can be read in Fernand Mendes Pinto, *Voyage Aventureux*, ed. Jacques Boulanger (Paris: Plon, 1932), pp.267-269. See also Kammerer, *La Découverte de la Chine par les Portugais*, p.94.

(1526–1588), to Guangzhou. They were allowed to stay there for a few months. Thus, Nunez Barreto not only fulfilled the wish of Francis Xavier but also founded a pilgrimage site in Sancian.

For the missionaries who were also able to enter China later on, Sancian would be like the "threshold of the Promised Land." St Francis was therefore compared to Moses who, after guiding the people of God for 40 years in the desert, was yet to cross the Jordan River to enter into the Promised Land, but could only see it from afar and died.

Yet, Father Louis Le Comte (1655-1729), in a book published in 1696, underscored differences between Francis Xavier and Moses: first, Moses wanted to enjoy the wealth of the promised land, but Francis wanted to bring to China the treasure of the Gospel. Second, Moses died before reaching it as a punishment for his lack of faith, but Francis Xavier died in Sancian as a reward for his zeal.⁷ In 1700, Castner also compared Francis Xavier to Moses, emphasizing that Francis guided the next generation of missionaries to China: "As well as for Moses, it was given to Xavier to contemplate from afar the promised land, by an inscrutable mystery of the Divine Providence, the entrance to China was reserved to his followers."⁸

When Francis Xavier was in Sancian, he might have seen his "Promised Land" from afar, since the coast of China were sometimes

⁷ Louis Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine*, 1696, vol. 2, pp.206-207.

⁸ Gaspar Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ magno Orientis apostolo S. Francisco Xaverio erectæ in insula Sanciano anno saeculari MDCC* (1700) p.6 (3b). We consulted the digital copy of the book of Georgetown University Library. Every other page of Castner's book is numbered in Chinese. For instance, the 11th page have the Chinese number 六 (6), the 12th page is not numbered, the 13th page have number 七 (7), etc. We indicate both page numbers, for instance: p.11 (6a); p.12 (6b); p.13 (7a), etc. Repository of Georgetown University Library: <<http://hdl.handle.net/10822/556052>> [2020-01-21]

visible in the wild when the weather is clear, especially in autumn. Later the Sanctuary of Sancian would be designed as a belvedere.

The Memorial Stone of 1639

Today, in the church of Sancian, there is a tomb covered with a granite slab engraved in Chinese and Portuguese and dated 1639 (Fig. 1a). Behind this tomb is a fragment of another stele engraved in Chinese and dated 1699. This mixed combination is rather confusing. We have to remember that the body of Francis Xavier was temporarily buried in the soil rather than in this kind of tomb. The stone placed in front is probably a fragment of a Chinese inscription which was on the wall above the altar of the sanctuary of 1700, and the stone dated 1639 is the replica made in 2006 of a stele originally made to be erected vertically and embedded onto the ground, on the temporary burial place of Francis Xavier. The original stele visible in a picture taken circa 1935 (Fig.1b) had already undergone many transformations when it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Even though this stone has been modified, destroyed and finally replaced, it remains the reference point of the sanctuary for now almost four centuries.

The origins of this stone can be traced from a letter of the Jesuit Gaspard Citadella dated 1644.⁹ According to Citadella, in 1637, Father Bonnelli landed Sancian in his trip from Macau to Vietnam, and then rediscovered the burial place thanks to an old man living on the island. The rediscovery means that the temporary burial place of Francis Xavier remained unfrequented for decades after the Portuguese were allowed to settle permanently in Macau in 1557, which since then

⁹ Baltassar Citadella, *Relatione di quel che segui nel viaggio di Macao fino all'Isola di Sanciam, e della prima pietra, o Memoria collocata nel luogo della sepoltura del Santo Padre & Apostolo dell'Oriente S. Francesco Saviero nell'anno 1644.* (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu) ARSI Jap.-Sin. 118, pp.46-48.

Macau had the duty to fight against piracy at Pearl River Estuary. However, the remoted Sancian became a pirate hideout, difficult to reach from Macau.



Fig. 1a: Replica of the memorial stone of 1639 made in 2006. (M.M.)



Fig. 1b: The memorial stone of 1639 circa 1935¹⁰

In 1638, Macau experienced an economic crisis because of the shutdown of the trade between Guangzhou and Nagasaki. Shortly after, in 1639, Gaspard d'Amaral (1608-1646), superior of the Jesuit College in Macao from 1637 to 1646, ordered a granite stone with Chinese and Portuguese inscriptions to be placed on the burial place of Francis Xavier in Sancian.¹¹ According to Citadella, the purpose of erecting a monument was to honor the Saint who was regarded as the patron of the city of Macau, and thus obtain from him its economic healing.

¹⁰ Photo published in *The Rock*, a monthly Catholic magazine of Hong Kong, Supplement of February 1935, p. III; same picture in *The Rock*, December 1935, p.506. (Consulted in the Holy Spirit Seminary Library, Hong Kong)

¹¹ Charles E. O'Neill and Joaquin M. Domonguez eds., *Diccionario historico de la Compania de Jesus* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), p.97. See also Louis Pagès, *Histoire de la religion Chrétienne au Japon de 1598 à 1651* (Paris: Charles Douniod, 1869), p.881, and Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine*, T.I (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission catholique, 1932), p.217.

Before getting into details about the history of this stone, we will try to trace back its original look.

About its general shape, the stone was resized and the edges modified in 1869 to fit on the floor of the new church (Fig. 11). Therefore, the pictures taken after 1869 (Fig. 1b) did not show the original shape of the stone. This original shape, with the edges in right angle, was revealed by an engraving made from a picture taken in 1864 (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Pilgrims of 1864 behind the memorial stone in the ruins of the Sanctuary of 1700.¹²

The stone was also measured more or less precisely by different visitors along the centuries. Based on these measurements, we can estimate that the original stone was about 270 to 290 cm in height, with about 80 to 100 cm buried into the ground and 190 cm above ground, 80 cm in width, 16 cm in thickness,¹³ and hence about 900 kg in weight.¹⁴

¹² *Archivio Pittresco: Semanario illustrado* (Lisboa: Castro Irmão & C^a, 1864), 8^o Ano, n^o24, 1864, p.185.

¹³ In 1644, Citadella indicated that the stone comparable in height as a tall man and its foot was buried “half cana” (about 80 to 100 cm) into the ground. Citadella, *Relatione*, p. 48a). In 1696, Louis Le Comte wrote that the stone has a height of 5 “coudées” (‘cubit’ or forearm) and 3 of width. (Le Comte,

As for the inscriptions and positioning of the stone, Citadella explained that the side facing the sea showed a cross above the Chinese inscription, and the side toward the hill showed the name of Jesus (IHS) above the Portuguese inscription.¹⁵ This distribution of the inscriptions and symbols was confirmed by Gaspard Castner in 1700.¹⁶ Besides, Bouvet de la Touche who visited the place in 1702 confirmed that the Chinese inscription faced towards the sea and the Portuguese inscription towards the hill.¹⁷

An approximate survey of 1813 showed roughly the layout on both sides (Fig. 3a & 3b).¹⁸ Apart from the cross omitted in the front side, it confirmed the general layout described by Citadella, Castner and others, but also showed that the Portuguese inscription was already copied under the Chinese in 1813. Besides, picture taken circa 1935 (Fig. 1b) revealed the latest layout on the front side before the destruction of the stone. However, in this picture we can also see that

Nouveaux mémoires, p.170). In 1698, François Froger measured a height of 5 feet and 10 inches above the floor, a width of 2.5 feet, and a thickness of 6 inches. Froger used French measure units: ft = 32,5cm, in = 2,7cm, his measurements were converted as 190/80/16 cm; [François Froger, *Relation du premier voyage des Français à la Chine*, (Leipzig: Ernst Arthur Voretzsch, 1926), pp.59-60]. Castner indicated 5 Chinese "Cubitus" above the floor," (Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.9). A measurement of 1813 indicates: "O padrao tem de altura seis côvados chinos pouco mais ou menos, de largura dois, de grossura quatro pontos". (Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch*, p.199).

¹⁴ Granite density: 2,64 kg/dm³.

Height of 2.7m: $0.16 \times (0.8 \times 2.3 + (\pi \times 0.4^2) \div 2) \times 2.64 = 0.883 \text{ ton}$

Height of 2.9m: $0.16 \times (0.8 \times 2.5 + (\pi \times 0.4^2) \div 2) \times 2.64 = 0.950 \text{ ton}$

¹⁵ Citadella, *Relatione*, p.48b.

¹⁶ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p. 50 (25b).

¹⁷ Bouvet De La Touche, "Journal de Voyage," in Claudius Madrolle, *Les premiers voyages des Français à la Chine* (Paris: Challamel, 1901), p.75.

¹⁸ Anders Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch of the Portuguese settlements in China*, (Boston: James Munroes & Co., 1836), pp.198-199. The drawings were done in 1813, when the bishop of Macau, Francesco Chacim, organized a two-day pilgrimage to Sancian (31st August-1st September). Another drawing of the Portuguese inscription was published in *The China Magazine* (Hong Kong), June 1869, n°24, vol. 3, p.120.

the inscriptions were framed as the result of successive erasing and rewriting. The layout of the Portuguese inscription in the picture of 1935 being very different from the survey of 1813, it could have been modified in between, most probably in 1869.

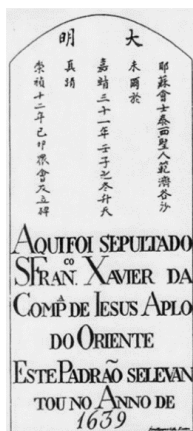


Fig 3a: The front of the memorial stone in 1813¹⁹

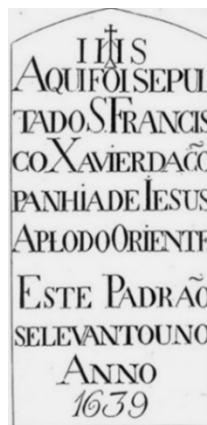


Fig. 3b: The back of the memorial stone in 1813²⁰

We assume that the Chinese inscription was originally written in three vertical rows rather than five. At a time when the stone was laid on the floor, the Portuguese inscription behind was copied on the side up, below the Chinese, on the foot of the slab originally embedded. In order to have enough space, the Chinese inscription was also packed upwards, thus having the need to bring the last characters of the first and the second row up to the top and insert them in the gap between the rows.

¹⁹ Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch*, p.198.

²⁰ Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch*, p.199.

One problem remains was about the date of 1639 in the Portuguese inscription. François Froger, who saw the stone in 1698, read the date as 1688.²¹ Louis de Chancel de Lagrange (1678-1747), who was together with Froger read instead 1689.²² Castner, in his book published in 1700, wrote twice that the stone dated as 1640,²³ and he also mentioned that the inscription was restored in 1688 (*renovatis in primis litteris*).²⁴ These discrepancies indicate that the date of the Portuguese inscription was illegible. The explanation is in the account of Citadella mentioned below.

According to Citadella, the stone engraved in Macau in 1639 was brought to Sancian the same year by Father Gasparo Luiz. But they could not carry the stone up to the burial place, maybe because it was too heavy or because they could not find the site. Therefore, they buried it close to the northern cape of the island, 10 kilometers away from the burial place.

The opportunity to erect the stone was an anti-piracy expedition organized by Macau in the first days of September 1644. It included two vessels, each one with a team of 60 men and their captains. Four Jesuits came along with them. Arrived in Sancian, they rediscovered the stone and carried it onto a little boat. While the captains and their men fight against the pirates, the priests reached the northern shore where the islanders were watching the battle. This battle was rather a show of force, with musket blows, drum and trumpet, to flee the enemy. Neither the captains nor the pirates wanted their man to get wounded. Among the islanders was the old man who indicated the burial place to

²¹ Froger, *Relation*, p.60.

²² Louis Chancel de Lagrange, *Voyages curieux faits dans diverses provinces*, p. 254. Unpublished Manuscript.

²³ Castner, *op.cit.*, p.9 and p.51.

²⁴ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.12 (6b): "*quae in vicinia jacebat Petram, mundatam pariter, ac renovatis in primis litteris, Sepulturæ restituit.*"

Father Bonnelly few years before. Called by this man, about 80 villagers offered to transport the stone up to the burial place. When the stone was erected, the date of 1639 was changed into 1644 in the Portuguese inscription but not in the Chinese. Actually, in Chinese the date must include the name of the emperor. But Chongzhen, the last emperor of Ming Dynasty suicided in April 1644, and the name of the next emperor was still unknown in September 1644. Citadella explained in his letter that he hoped that the Chinese inscription could be changed later according to the Portuguese.²⁵ But, on the contrary, the date of the Portuguese inscription was changed, probably during the restoration of 1688, according to the date of the Chinese inscription. The figures twice erased and rewritten were probably badly engraved and difficult to read, therefore, around 1700, Castner read it as 1640 instead of 1644, and Froger and Lagrange read it as 1688 or 1689 instead of 1639.

Based on these elements, we assume that the original layout of the inscriptions could be reconstructed as follow (Fig. 3):

²⁵ Citadella, *Relatione*, p. 48b.

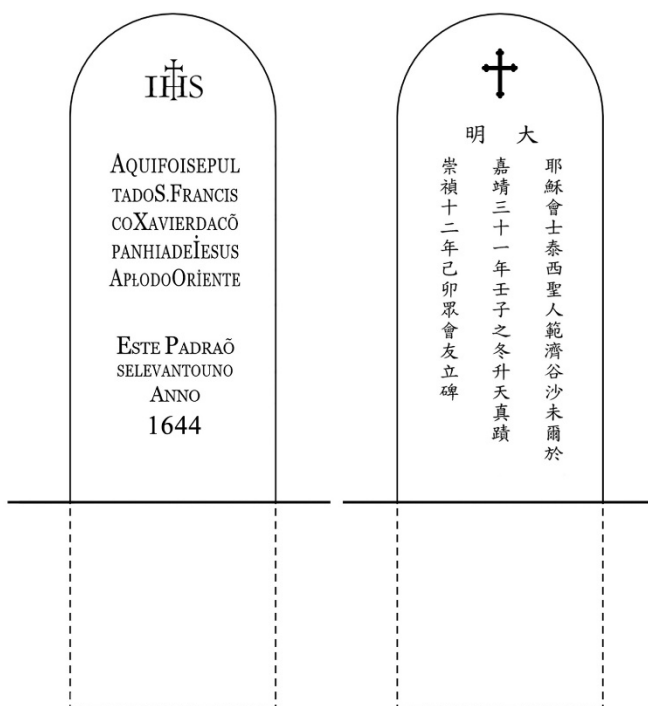


Fig. 3: Hypothesis of reconstruction of the original size and layout of the inscriptions of the memorial stone raised in 1644 in Sancian (M.M.)

It is also noteworthy that the Chinese text was to read in this order: 耶穌會士泰西聖人範濟谷沙未爾於 大明 嘉靖三十一年壬子之冬升天真蹟；崇禎十二年己卯眾會友立碑。 It means that “*The Jesuit St Francis Xavier coming from the Extreme-Occident ascended to the sky in the winter of the 31st year of the reign of the Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty. This stone was erected by his fellows in the 12th year of the reign of the Emperor Chongzhen, the Year of the Rabbit.*” The Portuguese text means “*Here was buried St. Francis Xavier of the Company of Jesus, Apostle of the Orient. This stone was raised in the year of 1639.*”

According to a legend recounted by Castner in 1700,²⁶ although the Chinese inscription indicated that it was just a grave, villagers believed that the Portuguese inscription, which they could not understand, was a secret message to indicate a buried treasure there. Therefore, they overturned the stone to search and dug for the treasure, until leaving with disappointment. As a punishment for the violation of this holy place, rain stopped falling for years. In 1688, a vessel carrying Andrea Coelho, the governor of Macau, and Filipo Carrossi, an Italian Jesuit, on board was miraculously pushed by the wind to the island. They remembered that St Francis was once buried there and sought for the burial place. They discovered the stone overturned among some trees. So they chopped the trees, straightened the stone and said a Mass. After that, rain fell again, and the villagers, who rejoiced for this miracle, understood that they had to respect this holy place.

Although it is a legend, this story contains interesting elements about the history and meaning of this place: it is first of all an “empty” place: there is no remains of the body of Francis Xavier, nor any “treasure” buried there. Second, it is a “holy” but “abandoned” place, where pilgrims had not come for decades. Lastly, a restoration of the stone might have really been commissioned by the Governor of Macao and the Jesuits in 1688.

In a book published in 1696, Louis Le Comte also gave an account of the visit by Coelho and Carrossi to Sancian, in which he described a sanctuary they would then have built:

²⁶ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, pp.12-14 (6a-7a).

"In order to keep the memory of this place, they decided to build a great wall forming a square all around the grave and to dig a trench to protect it from the running water. In the center of the four walls, they erected the stone which was found overturned and built an altar to commemorate the holy Mass which they celebrated and to serve again some priests, if by chance or by devotion, would come."²⁷

Soon after, French readers of Le Comte went to Sancian and found that he had lied, for only the stone was visible on the spot.²⁸ But Le Comte's description of the sanctuary purportedly built in 1688 may however not be totally invented. Like Mendes Pinto more than one century before him (see above), Le Comte could have boast as an achievement the sanctuary that the Jesuits have long wanted to build in Sancian. This project was to build a wall, dig a trench and raise an altar, but the circumstances had not yet allowed the wish to become true.

The Sanctuary of 1700

Struggles in the Jesuits Mission of China

At the end of the 17th Century, the development of a struggle among the Jesuits in China accelerated the construction of a sanctuary in Sancian. The first issue was a divergence among missionaries about evangelizing method. In the 1580s, the superior of the Jesuits of Japan and China, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), defended the "Adaptation method" and wanted to exclude from Japan and China the missionaries of the mendicant orders who would never accept it. Then,

²⁷ Louis Le Comte, *Nouveau Mémoire sur l'état présent de la Chine*, Tome 2, Lettre XI, 3rd edition, Paris, 1697. pp.170-171.

²⁸ François Froger, *Relation*, p.60. About the invented description of Sancian by Le Comte, see also Madrolle, *Les premiers voyages*, p.75.

the Jesuits obtained from the Pope and from the King of the united crowns of Spain and Portugal the exclusivity of the mission in Japan and China.²⁹

According to Valignano's method, Michele Ruggeri (1543-1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) adopted some of the local customs and avoided to speak too loud about the most shocking point of Christianity. Besides, the Jesuits hoped that the entire China would become Catholic if the emperor converted himself, and they aimed to settle in Beijing. In 1610, Niccolò Longobardi (1565-1654) succeeded Ricci as superior of the Jesuits in China and questioned some of his predecessor's choices. As a consequence, the Jesuits were divided into two schools prefiguring the parties of the "Chinese rites controversy."

In 1631, the Pope reopened fully the China mission to the mendicant orders.³⁰ These missionaries worked in various provinces of China, rather with the Jesuits belonging to the school of Longobardi than with the Jesuits in Beijing.³¹ They considered that evangelizing could not shut up the scandal of the Cross and did more converts, which displeased the imperial authority. Meanwhile, in Beijing, Johann Adam Schall (1592-1666), Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) and other Jesuits continued the footsteps of Ricci to serve the emperor.

During the second half of 17th Century, the French became the majority among the missionaries in China, and the King of France started to challenge the Portuguese *Padroado*. Thus, in 1685, six

²⁹ Jean-Pierre Duteil, *Le Mandat du Ciel*. Le rôle des jésuites en Chine, de la mort de François-Xavier à la dissolution de la compagnie de Jésus (1552-1774), (Paris: Arguments, 1994), p.12.

³⁰ Joseph Sebes, "Les prédécesseurs de Ricci," in Michel MASSON, (ed.), *Matteo Ricci, un jésuite en Chine*, (Paris: Éditions des Facultés Jésuites, 2010). p.66.

³¹ Duteil, *Le Mandat du Ciel*, pp.96-100.

French Jesuits sailed for a diplomatic mission to the Orient. They first accompanied the Ambassador of King Louis XIV to the Kingdom of Siam. Then, five of these Jesuits, who were given the title of “Mathematicians of the King,” continued their way to China. One of them, Claude de Visdelou (1656-1737), settled in Guangzhou and cooperate with the Jesuits in Macau. He built a church in Guangzhou and another one in Foshan. Four other Jesuits (Jean de Fontaney, Joachim Bouvet, Jean-François Gerbillon and Louis Le Comte) continued their way to Beijing where they settled in 1688. Bouvet and Gerbillon were then admitted to the imperial court, thanks to a Portuguese Jesuit. Their settlement in Beijing in 1688 was remembered as the foundation of the so-called “French mission in Beijing.”

In 1689, Jean Basset (1662-1707), a MEP missionary who previously went to Siam with the French ambassador, finally reached China. From 1695 to 1701, he was the procurator of the MEP in Guangzhou and did some pastoral works there, serving in the churches built by Visdelou. The latter had since became one of the main opponents to his fellows in Beijing, who were followers of Ricci’s method. These French missionaries took part, according to their opinions, in the dispute which ended in 1700 with the construction of a Sanctuary by the “Portuguese Jesuits in Macao” rather than by the “French Jesuits in Beijing.”

The Vow of the Passengers of the *Amphitrite*

In 1693, Father Joachim Bouvet was sent back to France by Emperor Kangxi with the commitment to bring back artists and scientists to Beijing. In France, Bouvet tried to convince King Louis XIV to send an ambassador to China. Louis XIV refused because the Emperor of China only accepted to establish relations with tributary kings. He also refused to provide a royal vessel because of the risk that

its cargo would be regarded as tribute. Bouvet however obtained from him some materials and financial support for the French mission in Beijing. For the vessel, he convinced a merchant, Jean Jourdan de Groucé, to create a company to trade in China. Then, the “Compagnie Jourdan” chartered a ship, the *Amphitrite*, to sell mirrors in Guangzhou.³²

The vessel sailed twice to China, in 1698-1700 and in 1701-1703. During the first trip, when close to Sumatra, the *Amphitrite* encountered difficulties due to the weather. The passengers prayed to St Francis Xavier, regarded as the protector of Seamen, and made a vow “to build a little chapel at the grave of the Apostle in order to cover it from the rain and to say Mass conveniently.”³³ Believing they had been saved from a shipwreck by St Francis, they now must fulfill their vow.

On 5 October 1698, the *Amphitrite* anchored at the south of a coastal island of China. They did not realize that it was Sancian until a fisherman explained to them that a Westerner had his grave on the island. Then, on 8 October, the Jesuits and some other passengers of the *Amphitrite* reached the bay of Dawan 大灣 on a little boat and walked across the island until reaching the burial place.³⁴ They observed the memorial stone and said the Mass. They might have spent about one hour on the spot. Several accounts of this visit remained,

³² Paul Pelliot, *L'origine des relations de la France avec la Chine. Le Premier Voyage de L'Amphitrite en Chine*, (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1930), pp. 28-29. See also, Henri Cordier, *La Chine en France* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1910), p.29.

³³ “Lettre du père Prémare au père de la Chaise,” Canton, 17 février 1699, in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3, (Paris: Aimé-Martin, 1863), p.10.

³⁴ *Carte des isles qui sont à l'entrée de la rivière de Canton, dressée sur les lieux par le P. Dolcé de la Compagnie de Jésus*. (Map of Father Dolcé describing the arrival of the *Amphitrite* in Sancian in October 1698.) Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département Cartes et plans, GE SH 18 PF 179 DIV 9 P 2 D.

written by Joachim Bouvet and his Jesuits fellows,³⁵ by Italian painter Gio Gherardini³⁶ and by a naval officer and scientist François Froger.³⁷

After that, they faced, for one year, problems with the custom of Guangzhou who wanted to know whether the *Amphitrite* was a commercial boat or a tribute from the French king. Bouvet tried to convince the customs that it was a royal vessel with cargo for business in order to obtain an exception of customs duties.³⁸ Waiting to be allowed to leave Guangzhou for Beijing, they thought out how to fulfill their vow by building a monument in Sancian. According to François Froger: "*Brother Belleville designed a pyramid and an altar shaped like a mausoleum. It should have been in marble or in any stone that could withstand the test of time.*"³⁹

This project was presented by Charles de Belleville (1657-1730) to his fellows on the feast day of St Francis, 3 December 1698. Then, they collected money among themselves to build it. The cargo of mirrors was finally exempted of customs duties and the Jesuits were allowed to go to Beijing. Benoît de Bénac of the Jourdan Company stayed in Guangzhou to sale the mirrors while the *Amphitrite* returned to France. Bénac promised Bouvet that he would provide anything that was needed for the completion of the monument. But it was not

³⁵ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3 (Paris: Aimé-Martin, 1863): "Lettre du Père Bouvet au père de la Chaise," Pékin, 30 novembre 1699, pp.17-18; «Lettre du père Chavagnac au père Gobien», Cho-tchéou, 30 décembre 1701, pp.50-51; "Lettre du Père Tartre à son Père," Canton 17 décembre 1701, pp.33, 38-41.

³⁶ Gio Gherardini, *Relation du voyage fait à la Chine sur le vaisseau l'Amphitrite en l'année 1698*, Paris, 1700, pp. 66-67.

³⁷ François Froger, *Relation du premier voyage des Français à la Chine*, (Leipzig: Ernst Arthur Voretzsch, 1926), pp. 56-61.

³⁸ Pelliot, *L'Origine des relations*, p.53.

³⁹ Froger, *Relation*, p.84.

realized because, according to Froger, the Italian Jesuit Carlo Turcotti had another project.⁴⁰

Bouvet de la Touche, the French officer and supposed author of the journal of the second journey of the *Amphitrite* to China (1701-1703),⁴¹ gave more details about the veto of Turcotti. He explained that Father Joachim Bouvet boasted with much fanfare to his project, provoking the reaction of the “Portuguese” who felt that the honor to build a sanctuary in Sancian was rightfully theirs.⁴² These Jesuits mentioned in some instances as “Portuguese Jesuits” or “Jesuits in Macau,”⁴³ were actually not Portuguese nationals, but missionaries acting according the rules of the Portuguese *Padroado*. Among them, the Italian Carlo Turcotti (1643-1706) was the Jesuit Provincial of Japan and China, and thus was in a position to refuse the initiative of Joachim Bouvet. He instead entrusted the construction of a sanctuary in Sancian to two other Jesuits in Macau, Caspar Castner (1655-1609) and Giovanni Laureati (1666-1727), a German and an Italian respectively.⁴⁴ Besides, Claude de Visdelou, a French Jesuit settled in Guangzhou since 1685 as we already mentioned, helped Turcotti to bypass the attempt of Bouvet, getting for him the authorization to build the sanctuary from the Viceroy of Guangzhou.

⁴⁰ Froger, *Relation*, p.84.

⁴¹ An anonymous manuscript of the BNF titled *Traité du commerce de l'étranger avec la France* (BNF, Mss. fr., n. acq. 2086) was published in: Claudius Madrolle, *Les Premiers voyages français à la Chine ; la Compagnie de la Chine, 1698-1719*. (Paris: A. Challamel, 1901). Madrolle attributed this manuscript to a Tenant of the *Amphitrite* called “Bouvet de la Touche”. However, Pelliot considered that Madrolle do not give any evidence to sustain this attribution. See Pelliot, *L'Origine des relations*, pp. 8-9.

⁴² Madrolle, *Les Premiers Voyages*, pp.75-76.

⁴³ “Lettre du père Fontanay au père La Chaise,” Londres, le 15 janvier 1704, in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3, (Paris: Aimé-Martin, 1863), p.134.

⁴⁴ Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne Mission de Chine*, (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission, 1932), p.488.

As the passengers of the *Amphitrite* did not want the refund of their donations, they gave the money to Jean Basset, a MEP priest neutral in this dispute among the Jesuits, and he used it for charity purpose in the churches of Foshan and Guangzhou. At the end, Castner was commissioned to be the in-charge of the construction of the sanctuary and of the Jesuit mission towards the local people.

The *Relatio Sepulturæ* of Gaspar Castner

The rare Latin book of Gaspar Castner, titled *Relatio Sepulturæ*, was printed in China in 1700 by hand-rubbing damp sheet onto inked wood blocks, on which the text was carved.⁴⁵ The book described the history of the burial place of St Francis from his death to the completion of the sanctuary in 1700. A German translation was published in 1729.⁴⁶

This book was controversial for the passengers of the *Amphitrite* and aimed to shame them. According to Castner, they were “condemned” by their vow for not building a monument in Sancian.⁴⁷ Castner did not mention that their project was actually rejected by Carlo Turcotti. He stated instead that the *Amphitrite* passengers had an argument among themselves on how to build the monument and would have given the money to their local fellows to build something else. But Turcotti refused this money and found the means to build the sanctuary from a Spanish merchant in Guangzhou, while the money of the French Jesuits “was given to the poor and used for other charity

⁴⁵ Georgetown University Library:
<<http://hdl.handle.net/10822/556052>> [2020-01-21].

⁴⁶ Gasparis Castner, “Grab-Statt des heil[igen] indianer Apostels S. Francisci Xavierii è Soc[ieta] Jesu auf des insel Sanciano, 1728,” in Joseph Stöcklein, *Der Neue Welt-Bott*, vol. 14, n°309, Ausburg, 1729. pp.2-13.

⁴⁷ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.17 (8a); “*ecce brevi se voti damnatam vidit.*”

purposes.”⁴⁸ Castner also insisted that the passengers were passing by and in hurry to go elsewhere, while Turracoti had been engaged for a long time in the local missionary works.

To be fair, Castner could have mentioned that the *Amphitrite* passengers decided themselves that their money would be used for charity purpose, rather than being returned. Anyway, the passenger remained embarrassed and worried about not having their “vow” fulfilled because of the religious value of a “vow” and the high miraculous power attributed to St Francis Xavier, and also because Castner publicized that they did not fulfill it though they announced that they would do so.

Apart from this little wickedness, the book of Castner is a treatise on the missionary’s methods. He dealt with the beliefs and behavior of the local people and explained how some villagers and other Chinese people were interested in Christian faith and eventually converted during the construction of the sanctuary. Castner first instructed and baptized two Chinese, and then send them as catechists in the island. After three months, he visited the six villages and baptized 50 people among a population he estimated to be 3,000. The connection between the mission toward the local people and the construction of the sanctuary pointed out by Castner was confirmed by a short comment of Father Tartre in 1701, in which the mission toward the local people seemed to be a project rather than a done deal:

“Our Portuguese fellows, since they built a chapel there, converted some inhabitants of the island. They want to settle a mission in the city of Coang-hai [廣海], which is at only 4 or 5 miles, and from where the one who will live there could go for some outing in

⁴⁸ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.16 (8b).

Sancian and in the nearby islands. Thus, they hope that this place, sanctified by the death of the Apostle of India, will not anymore be profaned by the cults of the idols, and that they will soon have there a fervent Christianity."⁴⁹

In 1702, Bouvet de la Touche, the official already mentioned, was on board of the *Amphitrite* for his second journey to China (1701-1703). He had read the book of Castner and the opportunity to study the newly built sanctuary in Sancian. He confirmed the size and the architecture of the sanctuary described by Castner and gave some additional details.⁵⁰ However, about the works of evangelizing of the "Portuguese" Jesuits, he said that he could not found any Chinese converts on the island. The mission extolled by Castner might therefore not have been the success as he described.⁵¹

The main idea of Castner's book remains that the missionaries who wanted to honor the memory of Francis Xavier had to be involved in evangelization works toward the local people. Now, one may wonder whether this point of view was more consistent with Francis Xavier's life than the vision of the mission of those who aimed to settle in Beijing. The two viewpoints might not be completely contradictory since Castner also followed their path and died in Beijing in 1709.

The Architecture of the Sanctuary

To attempt a reconstructed view of the sanctuary of 1700 (Fig. 6) we made use of Castner's extensive written description of the sanctuary and the floor plan printed at the end of his book (Fig. 5), as

⁴⁹ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3 (Paris: Aimé-Martin, 1863), p.41.

⁵⁰ Madrolle, *Les Premiers Voyages*, pp.74-75.

⁵¹ Madrolle, *Les Premiers Voyages*, p.76.

well as the descriptions and archeological elements mentioned in this paper.

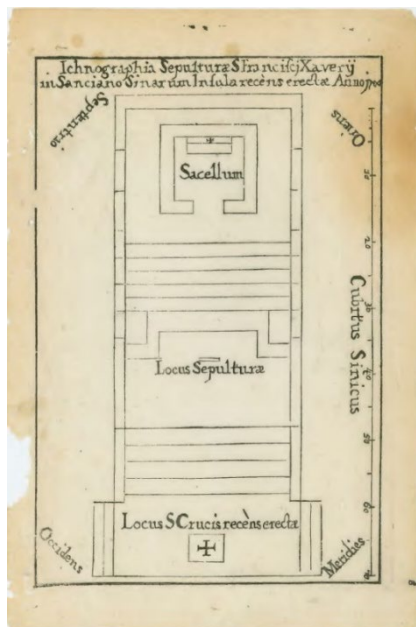


Fig. 5. Floor plan of the Sanctuary of 1700. Castner, *Relatio Sepulturae*, p. 61 (31a).

Castner's floor plan is not very precise and some elements such as the doors are missing (Fig.5). Yet, every stroke on the floor plan could be considered as describing something. Especially the strokes dividing the enclosure wall in different sections would correspond to the tiers at the top of the wall, which was built on a hillslope.

The sanctuary was organized in three parts, each one having one of the three main elements: the Cross, the memorial stone and the chapel. For the Cross, Castner said that it was 3 meters in height and 1.5 meters in width. In 1864, three fragments of this Cross were discovered and drawn. The drawing showed the sharp of the

extremities of the Cross⁵² (Fig. 7). Castner said that the purpose of the wall built around the sanctuary was to prevent intrusion. He indicated the height of the wall on the side and on the top, but not in the front. However, he mentioned that the Cross was to be seen from boats on the sea as a sign that Christianity has already reached China. To allow the view of the cross, the front wall should not be higher than the parapet. Given the location of the sanctuary was on a hillslope, even the height of the parapet would be tall enough to prevent any intrusion. Conversely, the wall was higher on the top.

Castner said that the chapel had a "peaked roof" without mentioning whether it was a gable roof or a hip roof. The word used to describe this roof is "*acumen*" in Latin and "*zugespitzt*" in German.⁵³ These words are unusual to describe a roof and could mean that it was very sharp, like a slender pyramid or a pinnacle. This peaked roof could also be described as sharp because of curved edges, as it is common in traditional Chinese constructions. It seems however to have been designed to obtain from afar a similar effect than the pyramid projected by Belleville, and a gable roof painted white would be more consistent with this purpose than a hip roof. Castner also mentioned that two fake columns were painted on both sides of the door and that the date of 1700 was written above the door. Lastly, a celestial sphere (armilla) mounted by a little cross was placed on the top of this "peaked roof." These elements confirmed that it was a gable roof. However, we have no idea of the tilt degrees of the roof, and Castner might have emphasized the sharpness of this roof just because this shape was unusual in Chinese architecture.

⁵² Ricci Institute of San Francisco, Canton Archives, Folder 3.19-VII, doc. 001.

⁵³ In Latin: "*superior in acumen*" (Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, pp.49-50 (25a-b); in German: "*oben aber zugespitzt*." (Stöcklein, *Der Neue Welt-Bott*, vol.14, n°309, Ausburg, 1729, p.11, col.2.)

Bouvet de la Touche provided additional information:⁵⁴ inside the chapel was a simple stone altar without decoration. Above this altar, the Chinese inscription on a stone sealed on the wall read that this chapel was built by Father Turcotti and Portuguese Jesuits. On the facade, the date was written “MDCC” and also engraved on a stone, and the celestial sphere on the top was made of stone.

Yet, some questions remain: Exactly how high were the steps? Was the wall covered with tiles? What was the exact shape of the chapel’s door and its peaked roof? What about the gates of the enclosure wall? Nevertheless, the available information was enough to get an idea of the look of this sanctuary. Staggered on the slope, it was designed as a belvedere opened to a large maritime landscape and a place to be seen from the sea. Its bright colors served the purpose of being visible from afar. The alternation of red and white color is still used all over the world on landmarks and other maritime navigation signals. Thus, the place is both conceived, for those who come there to celebrate the Mass, and for those who see it from afar, to signal a presence of Christianity in China.

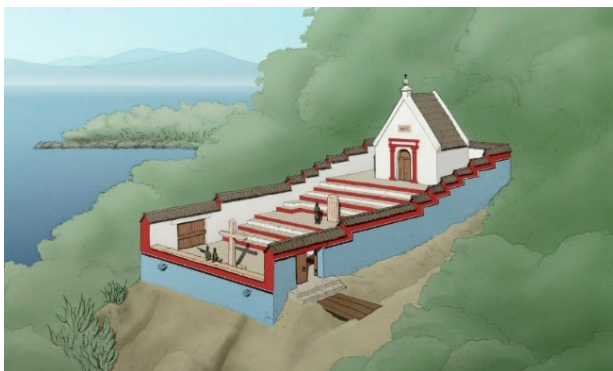


Fig. 6: Reconstructed view of the sanctuary of 1700 (M.M.)

⁵⁴ Madrolle, *Les Premiers Voyages*, pp.74-75.

Construction and Ruins

In Guangdong, it was far better to do construction works during the dry and cool season before the heavy rains in Spring. Castner mentioned this concern because these made the works start a bit late. It was however built in less than three months, between 19 March and 2 June 1700.⁵⁵

A cargo of lime was imported to Sancian. As it was insufficient to complete the sanctuary, a lime kiln was made for burning shells, which were the only limestone material present on the island.⁵⁶ The walls were entirely covered with plaster and painted.⁵⁷ It means that irregularly shaped construction materials were used and needed to be coated. Despite this, the bright colors of the construction produced an impressive impact when the works were just finished, as explained by Father Tartre in 1701: "*The Chapel built by the Portuguese Jesuits is beautiful. It is only in plaster, but the Chinese painted this plaster with their nice varnish red and blue, which made it bright and clean.*"

However, after visiting the place in 1702, Bouvet de la Touche did not mention the bright colors but pointed out some details which suggested that the plaster already started to crumble, and that the construction was of a poor quality. He wrote that the steps were carved straight in the rock and completed with bricks, and that the walls were of "bricks and soil."

Due to heavy rains in spring, humid weather in summer, and typhoons by autumn, this sanctuary would require ongoing maintenance to stay upright. Meanwhile, since its completion in 1700,

⁵⁵ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.53 (27a).

⁵⁶ Castner, *Relatio Sepulturæ*, p.54 (27b).

⁵⁷ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3, p.41.

there were only two recorded visits, in August 1701⁵⁸ and in 1702. Therefore, we assume that not much maintenance work was carried out and that the conditions of the sanctuary worsened soon, first with problem such as fading of colors, stifling of coatings, weakening of the walls due to winds and infiltration of rainwater, and dilapidating of the chapel roof. As a result, the sanctuary was probably ruined after a few years, even before 1724, when the destruction of churches and the expulsion of the missionaries was ordered in China. There is no evidence that this remote and unfrequented sanctuary was ruined by anything else than by the weather and the years.

The Sanctuary of 1869

Pilgrimages of 1813 and 1814

In 1813, the Bishop of Macau, Francesco Chacim (1767-1828), organized a pilgrimage to Sancian. The pilgrims discovered the memorial stone of 1639 on the floor, with both Chinese and Portuguese inscriptions facing up (Fig. 1b). Seeing a pit nearby, they believed that it was the burial place and decided to bring the stone closer to it. When they moved the stone, they discovered the Portuguese inscription on the back (Fig. 1c). They erected the stone to the edge of the pit, and the Bishop said the Mass.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. 3, p.134.

⁵⁹ Jean Garaix quoted an account of the pilgrimage by Francesco Chacim (Garaix, *À Sancian*, p.15-17). A Portuguese newspaper in Hong Kong reproduced the same account of the pilgrimage of 1813 and another one of the pilgrimages of 1814: *O Echo do Povo*, Hongkong, segunda-feria, 3 de maio 1869, vol. XI. n°18, p.1 col. 3–p.2 col.1-2. (AMEP, vol. 555P, doc.111)

Bishop Chacim and the pilgrims had actually a poor knowledge about the history of the place and were unable to understand the remaining elements of the Sanctuary of 1700. They believed that the pit was there since Antonio removed the coffin in February 1553. They also regarded the remains of the walls of the chapel as the ruins of a house where St Francis died.⁶⁰ The pit was perhaps a part of the ditch surrounding the 1700 sanctuary while the "little house" three meters above the memorial stone was definitely the Chapel of 1700. Thus, they were in the ruins of the sanctuary of 1700, but their mistaken interpretation of these ruins raised doubt about any sanctuary ever built in Sancian.⁶¹

In 1814, a second pilgrimage was carried out.⁶² Since then, Bishop Chacim did not go to Sancian again, but he paid a villager to take custody of the stone and the pit for some years.⁶³

Competition to Build a New Sanctuary

In 1848, Rome assigned the French missionaries (MEP) to Guangdong. Zéphyrin Guillemin (1814-1886) arrived in China as a missionary priest. In a writing of 1850, he mentioned about the ruins of the sanctuary on Sancian Island and his wish to rebuild something there.⁶⁴ Guillemin was appointed as the Apostolic Prefect of Guangdong and Guangxi in 1853. After he was ordained bishop in Rome in 1857, he stayed in France until the end of 1858 for

⁶⁰ Garaix, *À Sancian*, p.17.

⁶¹ Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch*, p.8.

⁶² The newspaper *O Echo do Povo* indicated the year 1814, *op.cit.* p.2 col.1-2, whereas Garaix indicated the date as 1815. There are however plenty errors of date and facts in the book of Garaix and it might be one of them.

⁶³ Garaix, *À Sancian*, p.18; see also Ljungstedt, *Historical sketch*, p.9.

⁶⁴ Zéphyrin Guillemin, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, T.22, Lyon, 1850, p.436-437.

fundraising. In 1862, he started the construction of a large granite cathedral in Guangzhou.

Meanwhile, Father Francisco Xavier Rondina (1827-1897), an Italian Jesuit in Lisbon, was preparing himself to be one of the last missionaries of the Portuguese *Padroado*. He arrived Macau in 1862 and thought about the tomb of his patron saint. Thus, Rondina, as a supporter of the ancient Portuguese *Padroado*, and Guillemín, as supporter of the new French protectorate of the Catholic Mission to China, competed to build a new sanctuary for the patron saint of the Catholic Mission to China. There was, however, a remarkable improvement in this new squabble between the French and Portuguese missionaries, since the two were competitors respectful to each other.

Given that Sancian was under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Guangzhou, Rondina contacted Guillemín and organized a pilgrimage there. On 20 November 1864, they discovered the granite stone standing, a bit tilted, in the remains of the Sanctuary of 1700.⁶⁵

Since Rondina had read the book of Castner, he was able to understand the ruins. He also found three fragments of the former granite Cross (Fig. 9) and decided to come back later with a new Cross of the same size.

The second pilgrimage was organized for 3 December 1866, the feast day of St Francis. The cross engraved with “S.P. FRANCISCO XAVEIRIO - MACAENSES DIE 3 DEC. 1866”⁶⁶ was brought there

⁶⁵ Francisco Xavier Rondina, “Histoire et description du sanctuaire de saint François-Xavier à Sancian,” in *Études de théologie, de philosophie et d'histoire*, par les Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus, T.XI 1866, pp.546-553; see also Garaix, *À Sancian*, pp.19-22.

⁶⁶ Ricci Institute of San Francisco, Canton Archives, F3.19-VI.I, p.001.

the day before.⁶⁷ Bishop Guillemin was among the 750 pilgrims. However, bad weather spoiled the pilgrimage and only a few people landed to attend the Mass disturbed by rain and wind.

On the return trip to Macau, Father Rondina delivered a talk and called for donations for the construction of a monument on the burial place by the Portuguese in Macau. An anonymous document kept in the archives of the MEP mission of Guangzhou showed the Cross brought by the pilgrims of Macau in 1866, and a pyramid with a statue of the Saint on the top (Fig. 10).⁶⁸ We assume that this pyramid was actually the project of Rondina.

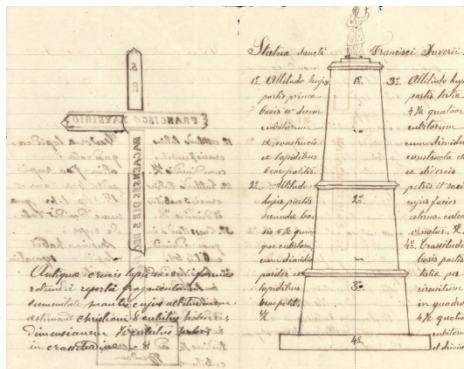


Fig. 7: Sketch of the fragment of the cross of 1700 and of a project of pyramid. The cross of the Macanese pilgrims of 1866 is drawn at the back.

The collection of Rondina was the starting point of his conflict with Guillemin. The later deemed that it was up to him to supervise the building of a new monument in Sancian, whereas, according to Rondina, the Portuguese donors refused contributing their money to a monument built by a French.⁶⁹ Then, availing himself with huge

⁶⁷ Garaix, *À Sancian*, p.22.

⁶⁸ Ricci Institute of San Francisco, Canton Archives, F3.19-VII, p.002.

⁶⁹ Zéphyrin Guillemin to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Guangzhou, 20th December 1866. AMEP, vol.555B-2, pp.1360-1361.

human, financial, and material resources for the construction of the Guangzhou cathedral, Guillemin decided to bypass Rondina's initiative. He wanted to do much more than the monument desired by the Portuguese,⁷⁰ though it might jeopardize the finance of the cathedral's construction in doing so.

Upon returning to Guangzhou, Guillemin immediately stepped up the construction of a new sanctuary in Sancian. Since he also read the *Relatio Sepulturæ*, he knew the main idea of Castner was that the construction of the sanctuary on the burial place of Francis Xavier must be included in an evangelization plan. So, Guillemin asked Achille Hermitte (1840-1871), the architect of the Guangzhou cathedral, to plan for two churches,⁷¹ one for a memorial chapel on the burial place, and the other one for a mission church to be located in a village on Sancian Island.⁷² On 8 January, 1867, Guillemin left Guangzhou for Sancian. He was accompanied by five Chinese Catholics of Guangzhou and Father Auguste Braud⁷³ who stayed there to inspect the works.⁷⁴ In the spirit of Castner's book, they travelled by the land route to Guanghai to evaluate the possibility of evangelizing this area. They arrived in Sancian on 12 January and first went to the burial place. Then, they visited all villages on the island and finally,

⁷⁰ Zéphyrin Guillemin to Ozouf, 22nd December 1866, AMEP, vol.555B-2, pp.1365-1367.

⁷¹ *Plans of Hermitte for the churches of Sancian*, AMEP, vol. 631, pp.6s. Other plans on tracing paper in the Map Department of AMEP (not numbered).

⁷² Zéphyrin Guillemin, *A MM. Les Directeurs de l'Œuvre pour la Propagation de la Foi de Lyon*, Guangzhou, 25th January 1867, Lyon, (Lithographed letter, AMEP, vol. 631, pp.489-503). See also: Guillemin, *Lettres au sujet de l'érection de la chapelle de saint François-Xavier dans l'île de Sancian*, Rome, 1870, p.30

⁷³ Auguste Braud (1838-1873), his name is sometimes written as "Brand."

⁷⁴ Zéphyrin Guillemin, "Lettre aux Membres du Conseil de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi," Canton le 12 juin 1869, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, T.41, Lyon, 1869, p. 421.

bought a piece of land in Xindi (新地), the closest village to the burial place, and hired villagers to prepare the two construction sites.

Meanwhile, Rondina wanted to ask the Viceroy of Guangzhou whether the Jesuits in Macau could recover the concession of the burial place. However, because of the French Protectorate on the Catholic mission to China, Rondina had to make this demand through the French Consul in Guangzhou, Gilbert de Trenqualye (1849-1851). Being a French and bishop of Guangzhou, Guillemin was in a better position to win the case, but he had bad relationship with the Consul and the stone of 1639 was a strong evidence that the disputed piece of land once was belonged by the Jesuits in Macau.

Guillemin was awarded of Rondina's claim by the English Consul, and then also claimed the concession of the land. The French Consul asked him to ground his claim substantially and Guillemin found an argument in the book of Castner. As mentioned above, it was actually the French Jesuit Claude de Visdelou, who obtained from the Viceroy the concession of the land of the burial place. For Guillemin this was an evidence that the land was previously granted to a French missionary in Guangzhou rather than to the missionaries of the *Padroado*. Finally, the new French Ambassador, Charles de Lallemand, visited Guangzhou in July 1867 and settled the case. The ambassador just communicated the demand of Guillemin to the Viceroy, who granted him the land. In Sancian the works had started six month ago.

St Francis Chapel

The church designed by Hermitte to be built on St Francis' burial place (Fig. 8) was a kind of abstract Gothic chapel that could have been built anywhere.

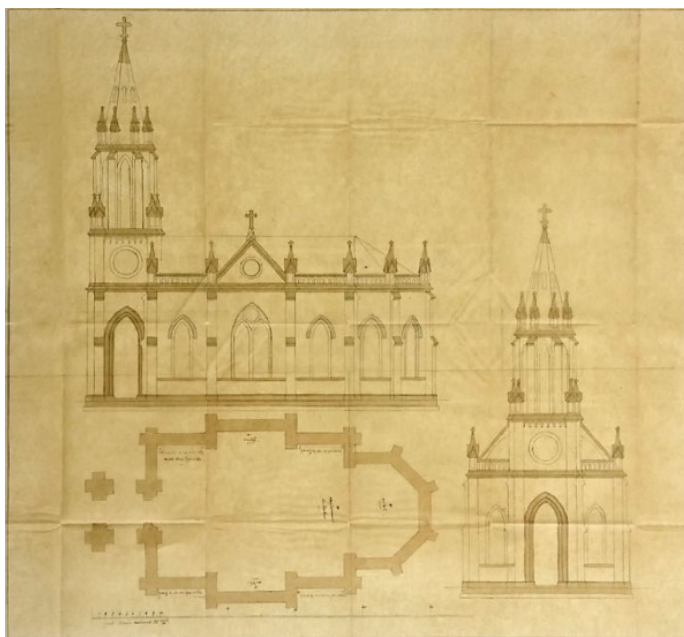


Fig. 8. Plans of the St Francis Chapel of Sancian, 1867, architect Achille Hermitte. AMEP, Maps and plans department, China (unnumbered document). The colored parts are in granite.

Developed between the 1830s and 1870, and based on the study of the 13th Gothic architecture, the French neo-Gothic architecture was characterized by an extreme codification of this style, which gave rise to two main models of churches. One is the “ideal cathedral” with two towers, three portals, three naves and three rose windows. It was to be located in the center of a capital city and to be the see of the bishop. For the villages or the countryside, the “ideal chapel” will be a smaller church with one tower and one portal at the center of the main elevation, but still has three naves and a Latin cross floor plan. The chapel of Sancian was too small to have three naves and a transept, but its elevations are composed as if it actually was. Thus, the chapel of Sancian can be regarded as an “ideal chapel,” complementary to the “ideal cathedral” that Hermitte was by the time building in Guangzhou.

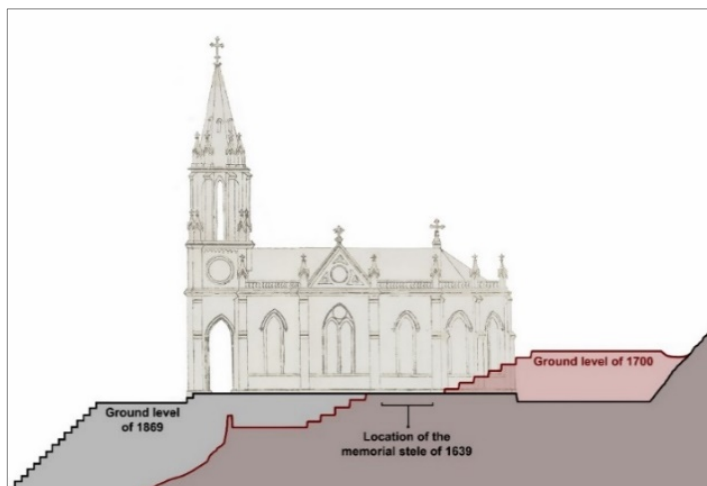


Fig. 9: Location of the memorial stone in the sanctuaries of 1700 and in the chapel of 1869, and earthworks of 1867 for the implementation of the new Chapel. (M.M.)

In Sancian, this rather abstract architecture was made meaningful by its positioning in relation to the burial place and the landscape. First, there was the need to create a platform on which a chapel could be built (Fig. 9). As the ruins of the sanctuary of 1700 were still visible, there was no difficulty to identify the burial place on the mid-level terrace. This terrace was widened as the result of mountain digging and building a platform facing towards the sea. On this new platform, the church had to be positioned in order that the burial place would be located right in front of the main altar. The memorial stone of 1639 was reinserted on the floor as a tombstone, just behind the altar.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Site Plan of St Francis Chapel of Sancian with the memorial stone and the panoramic terrace, December 1866. AMEP, vol.631, p.7.



Fig. 10. Interior of St Francis Chapel of Sancian in 1869. (M.M.)

Our reconstructed view of the interior of the church aims to give an idea the original shape of the vaults and of the position of the tombstone in relation with the altar (Fig. 10). This view is based on a short description of the interior written by Jean-Baptiste Berthon in the 1880s, in which he mentioned that the vault was made of “three-centered arches.”⁷⁶ We do not have more precise indication about their design. We assume that the arches of brick were completed of false wooden vault covered with plaster. Therefore, our reconstructed view is just a hypothesis. The “three-centered arches” (or “basket handle vault”) is a classical pattern of the 16th and 17th Centuries architecture. According to Berthon, the arches were supported by semicircular pilasters with Corinthian style capitals. Thus, the interior was “eclectic,” combining Antic, Gothic and Renaissance styles.

⁷⁶ Jean-Baptiste Berthon, “Autour du Tombeau de S. François Xavier à Sancian,” in *Les Missions Catholiques* (Paris: Challamel, 1886), p.402.

The floor was covered with marble. The tombstone was laid exactly on floor level, in front of the main altar, highlighted by a white marble frame carved with flowers. The memorial stone had been resized to fit in the white marble frame. A cut of the original stone has been sent as a relic to Vuillanfans, east of France, the hometown of Guillemin, and is still in the church of this village.

The main altar, made of teak wood and golden, was a replica of Gothic altar of the 13th Century. A communion bench and the Way of the Cross were added after the inauguration.

From the outside, the enlargement of the terrace towards the sea enhanced the overhang effect of the tower to the sea and also its visibility from the sea (Fig.13). Thus, the key symbolic elements of the church were the front tower and its octagonal spire. Guillemin wrote about it: "*this elegant spire will rise from the foot of this rock like the soul of the apostle rose to the heaven.*"⁷⁷ This interpretation refers to the Chinese inscription of the tombstone which said that St Francis ascended to the Heaven (升天).

⁷⁷ Guillemin, *A MM. Les Directeurs*, 25 January 1867, (AMEP, vol. 631, p.501): "Sa flèche gracieuse s'élèvera du pied de ce rocher comme l'âme de l'apôtre s'est élevé vers le ciel."



Fig.13: View of the church of 1869 according to Hermitte's design. (M.M.)

The Mission Church of Xindi

The church in the village of Xindi (Fig. 14) was designed as a functional building fitting the needs of the Catholic mission or of a religious community to host a school. The nave of the church was like a double-story hall with a gallery between the priests' rectory and other rooms. This church was equipped with a Gothic altar and an organ. The main elevation of the church was adorned with ogival windows and Gothic pinnacles. The small tower sheltered a bell. The two houses built on both sides of the church were planned for a school and other activities. The enclosure wall as well as its gate and the steps still exist.

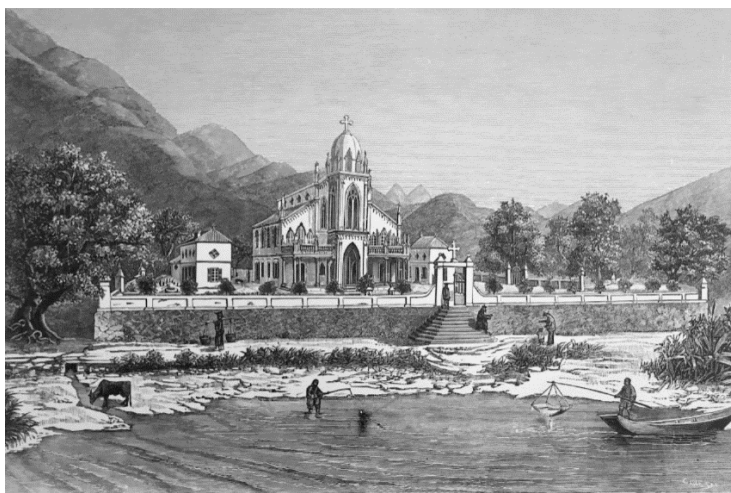


Fig. 14: View of the church of the mission in Sancian, Lithography by Canedi, from a drawing of Father Berthon circa 1880. APMEP, "Album des Missions Etrangères."

Constructors and Construction Materials

Except for the embankment, all the construction materials were imported from other places of Guangdong. To obtain the granite, Guillemin signed a contract with Shen Fu (伸福), called A-Fuk, one of the 10 chief stone cutters of granite quarries in Kowloon who provided the stones for the Guangzhou cathedral.⁷⁸ The required amount of stones for the churches in Sancian was not much because granite was only used in the base of walls, the top of the buttress, the pinnacles and top of the spire. Other coated parts of the walls were in grey bricks imported from Hong Kong.

⁷⁸ Contract between Bishop Guillemin and A-Fuk for the stones of the churches of Sancian (立合同單字人伸亞福承接廣東主教建造天主聖堂並書房共兩座之石料人工), signed 1st of March 1867 in St Francis Seminary, Dang long jau, (燈龍州書樓處), Hong Kong. Bilingual document in Chinese (p.4) and Latin (p.5), (AMEP, vol. 631, pp.3-5.)

Hermitte designed the plans for free and might not have involved much on site for he was then busy with the construction of the Cathedral of Guangzhou and the completion of the City Hall of Hong Kong. Furthermore, he also drew a plan for the Colonial Government's palace of Saigon, in Vietnam, and was awaiting to build it. Hermitte finally left for Saigon in June 1868 while the construction of the Chapel of Sancian was proceeding.

Thus, the construction of the two churches of Sancian was entirely carried out by Father Braud, by Wei Shouquan (魏壽全), who was usually called "Agy" (阿義), the main contractor of the Guangzhou cathedral, by the stone masons of the cathedral and by the people of Sancian hired on the site.

Inauguration on 25 April 1869

Few times before the completion of the churches, Rondina stopped to protest against the constructions of Guillemín and decided to join the inauguration with the representative of Macau and a large number of Macanese pilgrims. The ceremony was held on 25 April 1869. The day before the ceremony, about 200 Europeans and 100 Chinese Catholics reached the island. Women slept on the boat, while the men slept in the new parish buildings of Xindi.

In the morning Guillemín celebrated a solemn Mass in St Francis Chapel with Timoleon Raimondi (1827-1894), the Bishop of Hong Kong, and Pierre-Marie Osouf (1829-1906), then *Procureur Général* of the MEP in Hong Kong.

Two Chinese seminarians received their tonsure during the Mass. Thus, Guillemín dedicated the new sanctuary to the Chinese clergy. He would continue to ordain Chinese priests in this Chapel.⁷⁹ Bishop Mérel did the same from 1904 and Sancian was a fruitful evangelization field of the Chinese clergy of Guangdong until 1924.

Unexpectedly, after the tonsure, Father Rodina gave a "sermon" in which he praised the Portuguese protectorate as well as the bishop of Guangzhou. His main idea was that 1869 would be remembered as the year of the fifth pilgrimage of the diocese of Macau to Sancian (after 1813, 1814, 1864 and 1866). During this pilgrimage, a chapel built by the bishop of Guangzhou, who also wanted to honor a saint very important for Portuguese and people of Macau, was inaugurated.⁸⁰



Fig. 12: Engraving of the inauguration of the church of Sancian with people of Sancian bringing grilled pork.

⁷⁹ *Comptes rendus des travaux de la Société des Missions Etrangères de l'Année 1876*, Paris, December 1876, p.18. (AMEP, Lettres Communes, 1876).

⁸⁰ Francisco Xavier Rondina, *Romaria ao Sepulchro do Thaumaturgo S. Francisco Xavier. Sermão*, AMEP, vol. 631, pp.1897-1918. (Copy dedicated to Guillemín by Rondina)

The ceremony was concluded with the *Te Deum*. Soon after a group of people of Sancian arrived with cymbals and trumpets to offer grilled pork. After a while of astonishment and a short negotiation to avoid the pork being brought and eaten in the chapel, the feast continued outside. Guillemín appreciated this welcome gift highly and had it presented in the printed engraving which commemorated the inauguration of the churches (Fig. 15). After the inauguration he stayed one week in the island to visit the villages.

The Two Pyramids

The construction of a peaked monument visible from afar as a maritime signal has been a recurrent project in the history of Sancian. The first person who had the project to build a pyramid in Sancian was Charles de Belleville in 1698. For the sanctuary of 1700, the peaked roof of the chapel and the 3-meter high granite Cross undertook the role of maritime signals. In 1866, there was a project, which we attributed to Francesco Xavier Rondina, to build a pyramid topped with a statue St Francis. From 1869, the spire of St Francis Chapel fulfilled this role. However, Guillemín also wanted to build a pyramid topped with a statue,⁸¹ and a second one topped with a Cross and erected on the top of a mountain.⁸²

When the construction of the churches was in progress, the pieces of tow slender pyramids or obelisks were cut in Kowloon and brought to Sancian. But they were completed later, since the statue was not ready and people had to climb up to the mountain top with the

⁸¹ Zéphyrin Guillemín, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, T.41, (Lyon, 1869), p.421.

⁸² Guillemín, *A MM. Les Directeurs*, 25 January 1867, (AMEP, vol. 631), p.501.

heavy stones. Since there was no hurry, it was done as a part time job, at the convenience of the Sancian people.

Between 1870 and 1875, Guillemin was in Europe. He first participated the Council of Vatican and then stayed for four years to do fundraising for overcoming financial difficulty partly due to the construction of the churches in Sancian, which consumed 120,000 francs. They were eventually paid by the donations of French Catholics solicited through the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*⁸³ and the newspaper *L'Univers*.⁸⁴

In France, Guillemin ordered Jean-Marie Bonnassieux, a sculptor, to create a statue of St Francis Xavier. Bonnassieux was famous for the gigantic statue of Our Lady of France in Puy-en-Velay and for some sculptures in Louvre. His statue for Sancian portrayed St Francis as a priest with sacerdotal garment and also as a missionary showing the Cross (Fig. 16a). At his foot was an anchor, which symbolized the maritime vocation of the sanctuary and St Francis' being a traveler and protector of seamen.

⁸³ Guillemin, in *Annales de la Propagande de la foi*, T.41, (Lyon, 1869), pp.408-425.

⁸⁴ Zéphyrin Guillemin, "Bénédictio de la chapelle élevée sur le tombeau de Saint-François Xavier dans l'île de Sancian," Guangzhou, 1 June 1869, in *L'Univers* (Newspaper), n°866, Tuesday 14 September 1869, pp.1-2; and n° 868, Thursday 16 September 1869, pp.1-3.



Fig. 13a : Statue of St Francis Xavier by Jean-Marie Bonnassieux⁸⁵.



Fig. 13b: The pyramid of Sancian c. 1910.⁸⁶



Fig. 13c: The pyramid of Sancian in 1930⁸⁷.

The statue was cast in bronze in triplicate,⁸⁸ one for Sancian (Fig. 16 b-c and 17), one for the St Francis Seminary of Guangzhou (Fig. 18), and a third one for being placed in a somewhat Chinese style kiosk built in Échevannes (Fig. 19), East of France, near the hometown of Guillemin. A Chinese bell from Sancian was placed at the top of the monument. Only the statue of Échevannes still exists. It is however exactly the same as the one which was once in Sancian.

⁸⁵ S.A. des Hauts-fourneaux et fonderies du Val d'Osne, Catalogue n°3, 1876, pl.716. https://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/vo3_pl716-statues-religieuses/

⁸⁶ Picture from Colomban, *Zéphyrin Guillemin*, Macao, 1919, p.362. (The cross and the anchor of the statue were then broken and are drawn on the picture.)

⁸⁷ H. O'Brien, "In Quest of a Tomb," in *The Rock*, Hong Kong, October 1933, btw. pp.314-315.

⁸⁸ "Le Monument de S. François Xavier dans l'île de Sancian," in *Annales des Missions Étrangères*, n° 204, Mars-Avril 1932, p. 62. See also Patrick Joy, "The Pyramid of Sanchian," in *The Rock* (Hong Kong Catholic Magazine), November 1931, pp.338-340.



Fig.14: The statue in the St Francis seminary of Guangzhou, in 1934. (OPM Lyon)



Fig.15: The monument of Francis Xavier in Échevannes (Photo by Jean-Guy Simonet.)

The statue was brought to Sancian on 29 January 1877 and placed at the top of the Pyramid the same day. It was blessed the next day at the presence of three bishops, 36 priests, the French Consul of Guangzhou and many pilgrims.⁸⁹

The completion of this pyramid reinforced the main axis of the Sanctuary, where it now located the burial place, the memory stone of 1639 and the altar, the Gothic chapel with its spire, the stairs leading up to the chapel, and the pyramid with its statue (Fig. 17 & 18).

Father Jean-Batiste Berthon described the second pyramid, on the top of the mountain, in the 1880s:

⁸⁹ *Les Mission Catholiques*, T.9, 1877, pp.419-420.

“Following a path, we arrive on the top of a 2,000 ft mountain. There, a pyramid of 25 ft topped with a cross is the signal wanted by Bishop Guillemin for the vessels. Unfortunately, they sail too far at East or at West. From twenty miles away, a telescope would be needed to see it.”⁹⁰



Fig. 17: View of Sancian, c. 1880, Lithography from a drawing of Fr J.-B. Berthon, c. 1880, *Mission catholiques*, 1886, p.337. From left to right: the pyramid completed in 1877, the memorial chapel of 1869, the cross on the top of the hill and the village of Xindi with the second church.

According to a drawing of Berthon (Fig. 17), this mountain was *Tadingshan* (塔頂山), which is actually 1233 ft (376 m) high⁹¹ rather than 2000 feet as estimated by Berthon. Although this pyramid was not really visible for the vessels sailing 30 km away, it extended the pilgrimage to Sancian on a hike. Thus, Berthon used to bring the pilgrims up to the Cross because the view on the island and the sea was wonderful.

⁹⁰ *Les Missions Catholiques*, Autour du Tombeau de S. François Xavier, p.416.

⁹¹ *Map of Shang-Ch'uan Shan* (St. John Island), United States Navy Hydrographic Office, Washington, D.C., 1st Ed., July 1945; 2nd Ed., December 1946; revised in 1957. N° 6421.

Hopes and Setbacks since the Completion

The development of pilgrimages and of the missionary works in Sancian were compromised because of the Sino-French War (1881-1886). The sanctuary was looted in 1884 and the missionaries abandoned the Island in the 1890s. The damaged sanctuary of Sancian was further altered due to poor restoration and looting. A temporary lower roof was rebuilt in 1899 to replace the one rotted by the white ants. The Church was restored in 1910 with the support of the Jesuits in Macau.⁹² During this restoration, the memorial stone of 1639 was settled as the cover of a sarcophagus (Fig. 2a). Since the white marble frame of the memorial stone disappeared during the looting of 1884, the purpose was to save the precious relic from laying straight on the floor and also to avoid the presence of a fence which would hide the burial place. However, the meaning of the inscription on the stone that read: "Here was buried Francis Xavier" to indicate a burial in the soil, was thus distorted, suggesting that the body of St Francis was placed in this sarcophagus, rather than in the soil.

The chapel was looted again in April 1912 during the Xinhai revolution.⁹³ Despite the poor condition of St Francis Chapel, Sancian was a great source of pride during the first decade of the 20th Century since the number of Catholics had reached 2,000, thanks to the activity of Father Eugène Thomas and of the Chinese priests. In 1918, the new MEP Bishop of Guangzhou, Budes de Guébriandt, wanted to give Sancian island to the Jesuits in Macau, but they did not have any priest

⁹² Garaix, *A Sancian*, p.3; and at Ricci Institute of San Francisco, Canton Archives: *Fr. Eugène Thomas to Bishop Mérel*, (Annual report of 1904-1905, Sancian, 16th August 1905), F.5.25.48; Eugène Thomas to Bishop Mérel, Sancian, F.10.45.4, pp.7-8.

⁹³ *Les Annales Catholiques*, n° 2 193, 16 Juin 1912, p.267.

to appoint there.⁹⁴ Finally, the Maryknoll fathers took over Sancian in 1924. Father Walsh was ordained as Bishop of Jiangmen in the mission church of Xindi in 1928.



Fig. 18 Saint Francis Chapel before the renovation of 1932. (OPM Lyon)



Fig. 19 Saint Francis Chapel after the renovation of 1932 (AMEP)

The Maryknoll restored St Francis Chapel in 1932, with financial support of the Archdiocese of New York. Father Cairns managed the work himself but he was a better parish priest than architect. The Gothic octagonal spire was replaced by a cubic lantern in concrete and the 24 granite pinnacles crowning the church were scrapped. Inside the chapel, the former three-centered arches were replaced by ogival arches. Since the space under the roof was insufficient to fit this kind of arches, they were distorted, which explains their awkward shape.

On 12 July 1941, the church of Xindi was bombed by a Japanese destroyer offshore.⁹⁵ The damaged church was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution along with the tomb stone of 1639 and the granite pyramid with the bronze statue. After years of abandon and closure, St Francis Chapel was restored in 1986 and again in 2006. A new fake

⁹⁴ Budes de Guébriant, "L'Apostolat missionnaire de la France," in *Bulletin de l'Institut Catholique de Paris*, novembre 1923.

⁹⁵ James Kroeger, *On the Maryknoll Road in China*, vol. III, *Sancian*, (New York: Maryknoll Press, 1996), p.38.

sarcophagus was made in 1986. It was replaced by another one in 2006 covered with a replica of the disappeared granite slab of 1639 (Fig.1a). The layout of the inscription of this new slab was inspired by the survey of the inscription found in the book of Andreas Ljungderst (Fig. 3a). The granite pyramid was covered with concrete and with a new statue of granite placed on top.

In 2018, as part of the "Belt and Road Initiative," a museum of maritime relations was built in Xindi, behind the former mission church. Meanwhile, the guard house of St Francis Chapel (Fig.18), which was the very last original building of 1869 still standing in Sancian, has been replaced by a construction of somewhat Gothic style to match with the church. However, this house was purposely not in Gothic style because in 19th Century, the Gothic was regarded as suitable for sacred architecture and not for a house of secular use.

The current state of the Sanctuary inevitably raised regrets if it is compared to the state of the period from 1869 to 1884. On one hand the place is thus more conducive to a meditation on failure and desolation consistent with the end of the life of Francis Xavier. On the other hand, Francis Xavier's death in Sancian is related to the hope for future generations, and it is still possible to hope for a revival of the place, grounded on its centuries of history.

〔摘要〕聖方濟各·沙勿略（St Francis Xavier）於 1552 年 12 月在廣東省上川島逝世。雖然此地對中國天主教傳教事業有重要的象徵意義，但聖人的暫時墓地因位處隔涉之地，一直以來甚少朝聖者前往。然而，一塊於 1639 年在澳門雕刻的紀念碑於 1644 年在該處豎立了。1700 年，這塊石碑成為一座較大的聖所的中心點。該聖所建於斜坡上，面向海洋。不過，它很快又被遺棄和遭到破損。朝聖活動於 19 世紀才真正開始熱絡。大家今天看到的這座教堂顯示它是於 1869 年建成，雖然它經過不斷整修。它是與另一教堂一起建興，有兩座花崗石的尖塔，使聖所在周圍的景觀中得以伸延。本文的首要目的是重塑這些已失去的紀念碑、建築物 and 上川島的地形圖像。它們將有助我們理解，這同一地點在不同年代的變化和意義。這些紀念性的建築是聖方濟各·沙勿略生與死的隱喻，連接著天與地、東方和西方、海洋和陸地；其設計是讓人從遠處和海上都能清晰可見。相反地，它們沒有眺望中國的景觀，那裡卻是聖方濟各·沙勿略一生渴望到達的地方。