

would to be the Manchu policy towards international trade, implemented once the dynastic conflicts were solved in the 1680s, and known as the "Canton system."

At that time, Jesuit intermediation and diplomacy was used on every front and for all kind of purposes, showing the complexity of the scenarios that lay beyond and the universalism, versatility and capacity of adaptation of the "soldiers of Christ."

Macau and the Jesuits tried to secure their positions as best as they could, getting involved in several strategic diplomatic and military initiatives, both in provincial and central fronts, and even aligning with both of the Chinese conflicting parties. Schall secured the situation in Peking with the Qing, while Sambiasi, Koffler and Boym stood by the falling Ming, as just seen. Álvaro Semedo, despite his previous contacts with the Southern Ming, was sent to visit the new Qing Viceroy of Canton with the usual presents from Macau in 1651.<sup>133</sup> The blockade<sup>134</sup> of the Dutch approach to the Court, aimed at establishing direct commercial relations with Canton in 1655–1657, was a "joint enterprise" performed by Fathers Adam Schall – who served as an interpreter to the embassy, Gabriel de Magalhães and Ludovicus Buglio, S.J. (1606–1682) in Peking. In the South, the blockade was supported by the Macau traditional alliance between the Jesuits and the *Senado* – that send a deputation to Canton composed of the Macau-born Jesuit Father Baltazar Caldeira, S.J. (1608–?) with three *moradores*. Interestingly enough, it seems that Father Martino Martini's contacts with the Dutch,<sup>135</sup> not only while imprisoned at Macassar and Batavia in 1652–1653 but also while in Europe traveling to Amsterdam (at the expense of the Dutch East India Company for editorial purposes), might have somehow contributed to that very Dutch diplomatic approach to China, but that is another rather more complex and diverse topic.

To conclude, despite all its misunderstandings, Boym's mission was determined by a genuine belief in the Christian principles of friendship, brotherhood, hope, faith and benevolence and guided by an indisputable somewhat blind missionary fervour capable of ignoring and defying reality.

Phelippe Maz a 2 de Dez.bro de 651 [sic], copy in Boxer, *A Cidade de Macau*, pp. 22–23, with no reference to the source.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>134</sup> See the letter of João Cabral, S.J. to the Patriarch of Ethiopia of 1655, ARSI, Jap. Sin. 22, ff. 334r–337v.

<sup>135</sup> See the contribution by Noel Golvers in this volume and Pfister, vol. I, p. 258, n. 1. Cf. Annual letter of 1644 compiled by António de Gouvea, *Cartas Anuas da China*, pp. 197–198.

PRESENTING THE "NESTORIAN" MONUMENT  
FROM THE LATE SEVENTEENTH  
TO THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  
THE ROLE OF MICHAŁ PIOTR BOYM (1612–1659)  
AND CLAUDE VISDELOU (1656–1737)

JOHN W. WITEK, S.J. (1933–2010)\*

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Research on this topic led to some interesting, but at times inaccurate statements about Father Michał Piotr Boym, a Jesuit missionary in China whose writings became a link in the cultural relations of China and Europe during the seventeenth century and later. In the 1876 edition of *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Carl Gustav Adolph Siegfried wrote a biographical sketch of Boym in one sentence, mentioned Boym's *Flora Sinensis* of 1656 and his writings about medicine that André Cleyer (1634?–1698) edited. He then concluded: "Because of the newer literature about China, everything else has become fairly meaningless."<sup>1</sup> The term *fairly* meaningless raises questions concerning nineteenth-century historiography about China. This conference with its focus on Boym seeks to broaden and rectify that discussion.

A major thrust of the literature about the "Nestorian" Monument centers on its discovery or on its being featured in the work of Athanasius Kircher (1601–

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<sup>1</sup> "Alles ist durch die neuere Literatur über China ziemlich bedeutungslos geworden." *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 3 (1876), p. 222.

1680), especially his *China Monumentis qua sacris ... illustrata* that was published in Amsterdam in 1667. In literature about Kircher's book at best only passing references are made to Boym's contribution. The Nicolas Trigault Latin version of Matteo Ricci's diary that stirred an interest in China among its readers created more curiosity in that vast land that was so little known in the West during the early seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Kircher saw an opportunity to help the West understand China and presented his volume that was also translated into several languages. In fact Kircher used the Monument as the key feature of his book. When Boym visited Rome in the 1650s, he sent a letter to Kircher explaining the background and significance of the Monument. Although Kircher had references about the Monument in the writings of Martino Martini and Alvaro Semedo, nonetheless the letter of Boym became the cardinal piece in Kircher's volume.

The aim of this paper is to study Boym's letter and thus his translation and understanding of the Monument. Then the focus will be on the translation of Claude Visdelou that was completed in the opening decades of the eighteenth century but not published until years later. In chronological order the focus is first on Boym.

#### Boym's Biography

Several biographical aspects about Boym require our attention. A native of Lwów and son of Pawel Boym, the principal physician at the court of King Sigismund III, Michał Boym was born in 1612, and entered the Society of Jesus in Cracow in 1631. A volunteer for the China mission, he reached Macao in 1659 and a year later was at the court of the last Ming dynasty emperor, Yongli 永曆. Sent as an envoy to Rome by Helen, the empress dowager, he arrived in Goa in May 1651, traveled to Persia and Smyrna, and eventually reached Venice, Italy where in December 1652 he had an audience with the Doge. Officials in Italy and even the Jesuit General questioned his authenticity as an envoy from China so that he spent three years in Rome unsuccessfully trying to get a papal audience. During his stay he became acquainted with his fellow Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher, who was planning to publish a book on China. Boym left Rome and was in Lisbon where he embarked for Asia in March 1656. Two years later he was in Siam and then Tonkin en route to Guangxi. At the borders between Tonkin and Guangxi he died in August, 1659 so that 2009 was the 450th anniversary of his death.

#### Boym's Letter

In his letter to Kircher about the Monument, Boym wasted no time in his opening statement by affirming that among the monuments of the Catholic faith that had been preached in China and were found in that empire, the distinguished place (*praecipuum locum*) was the marble stone that had been dug up "with its Chinese writing and with old Syriac characters and the register of Chaldean priests one

thousand years ago."<sup>3</sup> While recognizing that Kircher had given a Latin interpretation to the Monument in his earlier work, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* and Alvaro Semedo as procurator of the vice-Province of China had done so in Italian,<sup>4</sup> yet, Boym indicated, the present publication had the Chinese characters, as well as the Latin characters with a literal Latin interpretation (*de verbo ad verbum*) retaining the Chinese phrasing. The reader thus had the text written in 782 that reflected the preaching of the faith in China in 636. Boym stressed that the doctrine that the Jesuits ("masters of the Great West" as they were called by the Chinese) were preaching the same teaching in their books that were printed before the discovery of the Monument. Thereafter, Boym added that there was a need for a brief explanation how the Monument was discovered and discussed the size of the Monument with the Syriac writing on the sides of the Monument itself. To the reader he explained the Chinese custom of having more than one name so that Christians at Baptism received a name in addition to their names that they still retained.

Boym then immediately stated that the governor of the place where the Monument was found was "excited" (*percussus*) by the novelty of the event and also by an omen (on that very same day his son died). The governor ordered that an elegant composition praising the Monument be written and that it be inscribed on another similar stone so that each of these were to be placed in the sacred precinct (*fano*) of the Daoist monks – a milestone distant from the walls of the metropolis of Xi'an fu.<sup>5</sup> The action of this Chinese governor was an important step since Chinese officials in the late Ming dynasty were not prone to support the Christian religion openly. But his measures toward the Monument have been misconstrued in the recent study *The Story of a Stele* by Michael Keewak.<sup>6</sup>

To put the discovery of the Monument into a larger perspective Boym pointed out that there were other traces (*vestigia*) of the preaching of the Catholic faith

<sup>3</sup> Kircher, *China illustrata*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Kircher, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* (Roma 1636). Alvaro Semedo, *Relazione della grande monarchia della Cina* (Roma 1643).

<sup>5</sup> "Admonitus Gubernator loci de Monumento reperto, percussus & novitate rei, & etiam omine (namque illi seipso die filius mortuus fuerat) elegantem compositionem in laudem Monumenti reperti fieri, ac in alio simili lapide marmoreo insculpi praecepit, utrumque vero in fano bonziorum *Tao su* dictorum milliari uno distate a muris Metropoleos *Sy ngan fu*, ad perpetuam rei memoriam reponi procuravit." Boym's Latin letter as in Kircher, *China illustrata*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> In his *The Story of a Stele* (Hong Kong 2008) Keewak points out that Kircher's information about the Monument was drawn "from Jesuit sources as well as a few idiosyncracies of his own." An example cited is his "contention that shortly after the monument's discovery the governor of Xi'an wrote a composition in its honor that was carved onto another stone" [italics in the original]. He adds that Kircher's Latin version renders the governor's composition as a facsimile of the first: "the local governor, marveling at such a vestige of antiquity, immediately wrote a composition in praise of the discovered monument, and on another stone of the same size he ordered to be inscribed all the characters and other marks of the discovered stone as faithfully as possible." See Keewak, pp. 33-34. But this is not exactly what Boym wrote as the Latin quoted in note 5 above shows.

<sup>2</sup> Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas*. Ed. Nicolas Trigault (Augsburg 1615).

that were found in China. Among them were images of the Holy Cross in the province of Fujian in 1630 as well as in the province of Jiangxi discovered in 1635. Likewise in the mountains of Fujian and in the city of Quanzhou 泉州 crosses were found in 1643. He added that Matteo Ricci encountered the "doctrine of the cross" (*Shizi jiao* 十字教) that led to the viewpoint that Christians lived in the confines of China when the Tartars in recent years invaded China and joined with the Muslims (Saracens), Jews, Nestorians and gentiles (pagans) and when Marco Polo, the Venetian, lived in China. About this, Boym affirms, there could be no doubt.

This affirmation is in contrast to his comments whether St. Thomas or another Apostle preached to the Chinese. Although in a long paragraph Boym presented the known data from Trigault and from the generally accepted view that St. Thomas had been in China, Boym is careful not to follow that same path. After reading Boym's letter, one notices in the next major part entitled *Interpretatio II* the translation of the overall title of the Monument as follows: "De magna Cyn (Judaea videlicet) clarissimae Legis promulgatae in Cum kue (id est, Sinarum Imperio) Monumentum." This is then immediately followed by: "Clarissimae Legis promulgatae in Sina Lapis aeternae laudis & prologus Ta cyn (id est, Judaeae) Ecclesiae Sacerdos, Kym cin retulit."<sup>7</sup> The identification of "Great Qin" is said to be clearly Judea and the next reference to the "Great Qin" is simply Judea. But these identifications, apparently inserted by Kircher, do not correspond to the distinctions that Boym indicated in his letter. After explaining the traces (*vestigia*) up to that time, Boym said one could not detect in this material any mention of St. Thomas or another Apostle as having preached in China. Boym noted that many centuries later, there were Christians of Prester John whom he thought were called the "Cult of the Doctrine of the Cross," and who with the Tartars or a little earlier penetrated China. They were from Judea, or rather from Syro-Chaldaeae or Malabarica, thus older than the Christian Tartars, so that their followers wanted to be called "disciples of the clear doctrine" (Kin Kiao, that is, *Jingjiao* 景教). Note that Boym uses "clarae doctrinae" whereas for the title of the Monument the usage is "clarissimae Legis." This points to the clergy of the St. Thomas Christians, a name that the Portuguese gave to the Nestorians of India, as Robert Chabrié has noted.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Boym continued his letter in stating his opinion that these preachers did not come from Judea, since they were Syrians as the names were attested in the Syrian language. The doctrine they preached may have come from Judea, but they were Syrian priests as their Syriac lists indicated. This subtle distinction was not fully addressed in the title of the Monument.

<sup>7</sup> Kircher, *China illustrata*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Chabrié, p. 226.

### Visdelou and the Monument

Thirty-two years after Boym wrote his letter about the Monument that was included in Kircher's book, Claude de Visdelou (1656–1737) had become one of the five Jesuits designated as "royal mathematicians" of King Louis XIV. A Chinese junk owned by a Guangdong merchant left Siam on June 17, 1687 and entered Ningbo in Zhejiang province on July 23. All five Jesuits on board expected to be at the service of the Manchu court under the Kangxi emperor.

A complex set of circumstances in Paris and Beijing led to the decision to send the French mathematicians to China. Only a few details can be covered at this point. Among the principal leaders in this enterprise were French astronomy officials at the observatory in Paris, as well as the Jesuit astronomer and mathematician Jean de Fontaney (1643–1710), the Jesuits Philippe Couplet (1623–1693) who had returned from China and personally discussed this matter with Louis XIV, and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), the director of the Astronomy Bureau at the Beijing court. The twofold plan included (1) sending French astronomers to work in Beijing and send reports to the Paris observatory and (2) several Jesuits were to learn the Chinese language, return to France and develop a collection of Chinese books for the Royal Library.

Couplet delivered a letter of Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688) addressed to Fontaney. About the abilities of Fontaney as an astronomer the Belgian Jesuit, Antoine Thomas (1644–1709), had learned in his 1677 visit to Fontaney in Paris and pointed this out to Verbiest in a meeting with him in Beijing. The invitation of Verbiest was the incentive that led, over time, to the entry of the royal mathematicians.

When envoys from Siam (Thailand) arrived at Versailles in early December, 1684, the French court crystallized a plan to send the Jesuit mathematicians to Beijing by way of Siam. After hasty preparations the six French Jesuits, who had been originally selected, left Brest in the company of the envoys returning to Siam in March, 1685. Within a half year (from September, 1684 to March, 1685), the Versailles court responded not only to the Siamese government, but above all sent six Frenchmen (Visdelou among them) who had never been to China and whose knowledge of the country was based mostly on limited printed literature and on oral discussions with Couplet during his short stay in France.

These missionaries were to collect scientific data about China and send it back to France. At first the French government arranged for passage for four men, but later this was increased to six in answer to suggestions that two younger Jesuits should be added to the group of four. Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730) was interested in going to China and had begun his theological studies elsewhere in France, but was allowed to continue his studies in Paris in case an opportunity to go to the China mission arose. In his diary Bouvet pointed out that his friend, Claude de Visdelou, who was his same age, was selected for the mission because Visdelou had already shown his skills in mathematics and had an extraordinary gift in seven languages, including Hebrew and Syriac.

Of the five royal mathematicians who entered Beijing<sup>9</sup> Visdelou alone has not been the subject of a scholarly monograph. While the remarks in this paper are not intended to draft such a study, some biographical data about him are necessary to understand his role in the development of Sino-French cultural relations, particularly concerning the Monument.

### Biographical Sketch of Visdelou

As is true of many Jesuit missionaries to China, there is scant information about their early lives beyond their date and place of birth and perhaps early education. In this regard Claude de Visdelou is no exception. Born on August 12, 1656 at Trébry in the arrondissement of Saint-Brieuc (Côtes-du-Nord), he was the third in the family of thirteen children of Jean de Visdelou and his wife, Elisabeth Poulain. His early education and his acquaintance with the Jesuits apparently are not recorded.<sup>10</sup> He entered the Jesuit Order in Paris at the age of seventeen on September 6, 1673. When the selection of four French Jesuits for the China mission was under discussion in 1684, he volunteered and was quickly approved by the superiors in part because of his demonstrated ability in languages.

Since the ship carrying the French ambassador to Siam, Alexandre Marquis de Chaumont (1640?-1710), was scheduled to leave in early March, the six Jesuit mathematicians had little time to spare. Besides completing their theological examinations and then receiving priestly ordination probably in early January, the two younger Jesuits, Bouvet and Visdelou were involved in discussions at the Academy of Sciences that had been first established in Paris in 1666. Fontaney, the leading mathematician among them, was formally named a correspondent of the Academy along with three Jesuits (among whom were Bouvet and Visdelou) on December 20, 1684. The Academy officials outlined the kinds of astronomical and other data they wanted these new members to obtain in China. On January 24, 1685 Bouvet and Visdelou together with Fontaney as their superior left Paris for Brest. There the Marquis de Chaumont disclosed to the group of six mathematicians the orders he received from the Versailles court concerning their mission. He also presented to each of them the letters issued by Louis XIV designating them as "royal mathematicians."

The *Oiseau* and the *Maligne* left Brest on March 3, 1685.<sup>11</sup> Diaries of the journey include descriptions of some of the passengers. Besides those of three of the mathematicians (Tachard, Gerbillon, and Bouvet), there are those of Bénigne Vachet (1641-1720), a member of the Missions Étrangères de Paris and the Abbé François de Choisy (1644-1724), a diocesan priest. Vachet was returning to Siam

<sup>9</sup> The group of six reached Siam, but was reduced to five when King Phra Narai asked Guy Tachard (1648-1712) to return to France to procure some Jesuits to work in Siam.

<sup>10</sup> See my biography of "Boym, Michal Piotr," in: *Diccionario histórico de la Compania de Jesús*, ed. C. O'Neill and J. Dominguez, 4 vols. (Roma - Madrid 2001), 1:517.

<sup>11</sup> Both ships arrived at the Cape of Good Hope and left together, but the *Maligne* became separated and was not sighted until they surprisingly arrived together at Batavia.

where he had learned the language and had acted as the interpreter who received the two envoys from Siam on behalf of Louis XIV. Choisy hoped to become the ambassador to Siam, but was appointed as the coadjutor to the ambassador in case Chaumont died. Choisy described Visdelou, who delivered an exhortation aboard the *Oiseau*, as a person short in stature, but with "tones that pierce the heart."<sup>12</sup>

### First Years of Visdelou in China

The landing of the Chinese junk at Ningbo did not assure the five mathematicians that they would enter China legally.<sup>13</sup> Repercussions awaited them in Beijing and elsewhere in China. The governor of Zhejiang, Jin Hong 金鉉, refused to accept the letters of King Louis XIV and wanted to deport the foreigners who claimed to be confreres of Ferdinand Verbiest, then director of the Bureau of Astronomy in Beijing. In a memorial to the *Libu* 禮部 (Board of Rites) Jin Hong stated that the five were not merchants, had books on mathematics and Christianity and also mathematical instruments. He recommended to the *Libu* that the emperor issue an edict prohibiting anyone from bringing foreigners into China. In its memorial to the emperor the *Libu* asked that the governor be ordered to deport the five men and specifically forbid Chinese merchants from bringing foreigners into China. But the Kangxi 康熙 emperor, then in Rehe 熱河 with Verbiest, wrote to the *Libu* that some of the five men might know calendar making. Those with that capability were to go to Beijing and await employment at the court; the others could reside in China wherever they wished. This is one of the few times during his reign that the Kangxi emperor overturned a decision of the *Libu* and went even further by allowing the others to remain in China. Moreover, the emperor's ruling was a direct challenge to the views of Jin Hong about foreigners. Furious about the imperial decision, Jin Hong delayed relaying it to the Frenchmen for fifteen days, but his ploy backfired when the emperor later learned what happened. From Ningbo the Jesuits wrote to Prospero Intorcetta (1625-1696), the Jesuit vice-provincial,<sup>14</sup> then living in Hangzhou and stayed with him from November 30 to December 21, 1687.

<sup>12</sup> François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 & 1686* (Geneva 2006), pp. 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Lo-shu Fu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-Western Relations (1644-1820)* (Tucson 1966), pp. 93, 98-99.

<sup>14</sup> Intorcetta was the vice-provincial, that is, the second ranking superior of the Jesuits in China from 1686 to 1689. He later had a significant role in the events that culminated in the Edict of Toleration of Christianity by the Kangxi emperor in March, 1692. Biographical details are in Dehergne, pp. 129-130; see also my "Understanding the Chinese: A Comparison of Matteo Ricci and the French Jesuit Missionaries Sent by Louis XIV," in: Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie B.C. Oh (eds.), *East Meets West. The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago 1988), pp. 89-91.

Allowed to travel on the Grand Canal, the five arrived in Beijing on February 7, 1688.<sup>15</sup> A few days earlier they had learned about the death of Verbiest and of the Empress Dowager. After the prescribed mourning period ended in late March, the five had an audience with the Kangxi emperor who decided that Gerbillon and Bouvet were to remain at the court, while the others could go where they wished. Visdelou went to Shanxi, where for two years he worked to develop the mission, but the lack of funds forced him to go to Nanjing for some time.

In 1692, Visdelou was engaged in the prevailing discussions about methods of romanization of the Chinese language. By then Portuguese and Spanish missionaries had been in China for more than a century and developed a system close to their respective languages along with romanized forms for Latin. Now that a French Jesuit mission as well as several other French clerics were in place French romanization forms were needed. Visdelou was a leader in this process. He indicated that writing Chinese terms in French romanization as the Spanish and Portuguese did was ridiculous. The best solution was to write the terms as they were spoken even if they had no relationship to French. Some examples were the final *n* as if it were followed by a silent *e* as in *lune* and the distinction between the vowel *i* from the consonant *j*. Visdelou opposed the viewpoint of some French clerics that the Portuguese should change their orthography of Chinese terms. Instead he stressed that those who wrote Portuguese works understood Chinese very well and had the assistance of leading Chinese scholars.<sup>16</sup> Visdelou's approach was to change some letters which had a different sound in French than in Portuguese.

In February 1693, the Kangxi emperor summoned Fontaney and Le Comte to come to Beijing for a discussion about the ramifications of the imperial decision to grant land to the Jesuits for a residence and a church that became known as the Beitang 北堂. Le Comte was unable to come because he had returned to Europe to report on the status of the mission. Visdelou, as his substitute, arrived with Fontaney in Beijing in June, 1693 and learned that the emperor was seriously ill. Fontaney had brought some quinine which helped to improve the Kangxi emperor's condition. In this connection, Visdelou met Yinreng 胤礽, the heir apparent who, in a discussion about the Chinese Classics, led to his assessment that Visdelou was the most skillful European who had come to China thus far.<sup>17</sup> Until 1699 Visdelou was based in Beijing and performed various assignments for the emperor such as acting as the imperial envoy greeting newly arrived Jesuits and expediting their entry into China.

From late 1699 until early 1700 Visdelou was in Fuzhou 福州 (Fujian) and then moved to Nanchang 南昌 from late 1701 to early 1702. During this period the complex question about the Chinese Rites had arisen in China and in Europe. Within this environment the Jesuits at the imperial court in November 1700 petitioned the emperor for a clarification whether the Jesuits' interpretation of the Rites was correct or not. Visdelou strenuously opposed what his confreres had done and began to study the issue more intensely. Many of his Jesuit confreres did not believe the rumors that he had become an opponent of the Jesuit interpretation of the Rites. But Visdelou reached a critical juncture during a meeting with the papal legate, Charles Maillard Cardinal de Tournon, in Guangzhou in 1705 when he openly declared his opposition to the Jesuit viewpoint. Tournon's audience with the Kangxi emperor later that year and subsequent events in Rehe and Beijing led to the imperial edict demanding that the missionaries apply for a *piao* 票 (permit) allowing them to remain in China provided they would uphold the interpretation of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) about the Rites. This edict of June 24, 1708 Visdelou translated into Latin and added some explanatory notes.<sup>18</sup>

#### Exile in India

For refusing to apply for the *piao*, several missionaries in the heartland of China were forced into exile first to Guangzhou and then to Macao (Aomen). In the late Ming period Portugal had gained control over Macao, but technically the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi had supervision over the town. Tournon had appointed Visdelou as the Vicar-Apostolic of Guizhou with the title of bishop of Claudiopolis so that the imperial order posed a problem for Visdelou. In a letter to Pope Clement XI, Visdelou explained the circumstances he faced.<sup>19</sup> He admitted that he should have written the letter to the pope immediately after he had been named one of the vicars apostolic, but was unable to do so. He was about to be expelled from China, but boarded an English ship which was diverted to Macao. Tournon replied that Visdelou should come to visit him in Macao. As Visdelou approached the palace (rather the prison, this is Visdelou's term), where Tournon lived, no one stopped him or asked him to identify himself. Thus he noted that on February 2, 1709 he was consecrated a bishop and added that after the ceremony, he returned to the ship. In that letter Visdelou pointed out to the pope that he would not return to Europe. Tournon had not ordered it, but had advised him to leave China as soon as possible. Because of this, Visdelou stated he was going to Pondichéry, India temporarily (*ad tempus*).

<sup>15</sup> For a description of the route that the five mathematicians followed from Ningbo to Beijing, see Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'empire de la Chine*, 4 vols. (Paris: Le Mercier, 1735), 1:61-80.

<sup>16</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Fr. 25057, f. 733.

<sup>17</sup> Further discussion is in my "Claude Visdelou and the Chinese Paradox," in: Edward J. Malatesta and Yves Raguin (eds.), *Images de la Chine: Le Contexte occidental de la sinologie naissante* (San Francisco - Taipei 1995), pp. 375-376.

<sup>18</sup> The Latin text is in Biblioteca Casanatense Ms. 1648, pp. 92-96 and Archivio Segreto Vaticano 243, pp. 133-138. A printed version appeared in *Sinica Franciscana* (Madrid 1995), 9:874-876, n. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Visdelou's autograph Latin letter of February 12, 1710, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Fondo Albani* 252, pp. 225-226. It was published in Levy Maria Jordão, *Bullarium Patronatus Portugaliae regum in ecclesiis Africae, Asiae atque Oceaniae*, 5 vols. (Lisboa: Typographia Nationali, 1868-1879), 3:274.

In fact Pondichéry became his permanent home. At this point in his life the Church had honored him, yet he was a disgrace in the eyes of the imperial court in Beijing. His status as a "royal mathematician" was further downgraded when the court in Versailles informed him that he would not be allowed to re-enter France, his native country. Despite these negative circumstances, Visdelou never gave up his abiding interest in China, its history and its people.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, several European scholars, both clerics and laymen, were interested in comparative history of diverse parts of the world. These were initial steps in developing world history although that term was not commonly used at that time. Letters from missionaries in China, Latin America and North America led some Western scholars to discussions about comparing, for example, the early history of China with that of Egypt and also the ancient Greek and Roman world. Questions about the recorded chronology in Chinese histories that challenged the Western view of accepting Biblical chronology as the norm for understanding the history of man, the reliability of the historical sources from China and other parts of Asia that abounded in their opening sections with myths and legends of the ancient past, and debates about accurately translating such sources into Western languages were a significant part of the intellectual environment of that era.

In Pondichéry Visdelou reportedly had about 500 Chinese books. With these at hand he pursued a career in studying China and sent his observations to Europe. His writings are fairly extensive with many still in manuscript form. His essay on the Xi'an Monument is but one example of his contributions to the eighteenth century discussion about China.

#### Visdelou and the Xi'an Monument

The starting point in the history of Christianity in China is the entry of the Syro-Oriental Church that followed the path of Buddhism along the Silk Road.<sup>20</sup> With its origins in Syria, this Church spread to Persia and then to China under Aluoben 阿羅本. Three years after Aluoben's arrival in Chang'an 長安, the capital during the Tang dynasty, the Taizong 太宗 emperor (627-649) issued an edict permitting the spread of Christianity, including the building of a monastery in the capital.<sup>21</sup> Aluoben had stressed in his essay explaining *Jingjiao* that loyalty to the state and filial piety to one's parents were not a challenge against Chinese traditions, but supported them.

The *Jingjiao beiwen* 景教碑文 (Stele of the Luminous Religion or the so-called Nestorian Monument) described the history of Christianity during that period. The Monument was buried near Xi'an probably during the persecution of

<sup>20</sup> For a brief discussion, see Peter F. Hofrichter, "Preface," in: Roman Malek (ed.), *Jingjiao. The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (Sankt Augustin - Nettetal [2006]), pp. 11-14.

<sup>21</sup> Antonino Forte, "The Edict of 638 Allowing the Diffusion of Christianity in China," in: Paul Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou*. Ed. A. Forte. Italian School of East Asian Studies: Epigraphical Series 2 (Kyoto - Paris 1996), pp. 349-373.

Buddhism in the Tang period. By chance a farmer digging in his field near Xi'an found it in 1625. The discovery caused a sensation in some parts of China and later in several European scholarly circles, chiefly because no one had any historical memory about such a monument.

The first European to view the Monument was the Jesuit Fr. Alvaro Smedo (1586-1658). Appointed a procurator to Rome in 1636, he did not have the chance to translate the entire text of the stele, but wrote a short description.<sup>22</sup> The first formal Chinese publication about the stele, entitled *Jingjiao beiquan* 景教碑詮 by the Jesuit Emmanuel Dias (1574-1659) was published in Hangzhou in 1644. Reprinted in Beijing in 1790 and in Shanghai in 1878, the work presents the entire Chinese text of the stele with a commentary on each phrase and each important term in the text.<sup>23</sup>

Years later, Visdelou, then in Pondichéry with a copy of the text of the Monument, translated and commented on it for a European audience. Indicating that it had been a long time since he had made a Latin translation which he had sent to Europe, he had not kept a copy.<sup>24</sup> He cautioned that the translation he was then making might not agree in some places with his first one. But in his view it was useless to raise questions about the Christian religion as found in the Monument, because a person could clearly observe for himself that the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation openly pointed to the Messiah and the true God. Also present were the customs and traditions of the Oriental Church, among them, offering a sacrifice once per week and teaching that prayers of the living were to be offered on behalf of the dead. Visdelou warned his readers that if some Chinese terms of expression offended the Europeans, the author of the text should be excused. Undoubtedly he was Chinese, but without the eloquence of the literati. He had Chinese erudition and perfectly possessed the history of the Tang dynasty. But at times he used pompous expressions of the Buddhists and was constrained to use metaphors of less appropriate terms. Visdelou noted that he completed a word for word translation with the exception of very few terms that might have required a long circumlocution. In those instances he used terms that made the best sense.<sup>25</sup>

To highlight Visdelou's translation and explanation, the French publishers of the edition consulted for this essay arranged the translation (called the *Éloge*) on

<sup>22</sup> For a summary, see Pfister, 1:144-145.

<sup>23</sup> *Jingjiao beiquan* is the short title of *Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo beisong zhengquan* 景教流行中國碑頌正詮. Reprinted in Beijing, 1790; Shanghai, 1878 and 1927. A more recent printing is in *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian xubian* 天主教東傳文獻續編 in: Wu Xiangxiang 吳相湘 (ed.), *Zhongguo shixue congshu* 中國史學叢書 40.2 (Taipei 1966), pp. 653-750.

<sup>24</sup> See his essay "Monument de la Religion Chrétienne trouvé par hasard dans la ville de Si-ngan-fu, Metropole de la Province de Xensi en Chine," in: M. D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale ou Dictionnaire Universel*. Nouvelle édition, réduite et augmentée, 6 vols. (Paris: Moutard, 1781-1783), 5:305-354. In 1719, Visdelou completed the Latin translation that he sent to Europe.

<sup>25</sup> A copy of Kircher's book with Boym's letter was in China, but whether or when Visdelou saw it or even if he had a copy at hand in Pondichéry has not yet been determined.

the left pages facing the explanation (*Paraphrase de l'Éloge*) on the right pages. The length of these texts prevents a discussion with elaborate details. One example may then suffice. In referring to Aluoben's efforts to spread Christianity in China, the text of the Monument says: "La Loi se répandit dans les dix voies." ("The law spread in ten ways.") On the facing page the paraphrase states "La religion se répandit dans les dix provinces, c'est-à-dire toutes les provinces de l'empire." ("The religion spread in the ten provinces, that is, in all the provinces of the empire.")<sup>26</sup> This example shows that the text of the Monument, even when translated word for word, is terse and reflects the Chinese original text. On the other hand, the paraphrase elaborated the meaning of the sentence that was necessary for the reading public in Europe. Moreover, Visdelou translated several long passages from the dynastic histories of the Wei and Tang dynasties in order to explain in further detail that the historical period described in the Monument was accurate. He also noted that Chinese works at times had descriptions of fables and other things of that genre that were similar to those of Europeans.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

Although various aspects of the translations of the text of the Monument are not included because of limitations in a conference presentation, several concluding remarks can be drawn at this point. Boym's letter and translation were integral to Kircher's *China Monumentis qua sacris ... illustrata* although his contribution has not been consistently appreciated. Boym offered a rigorous word for word translation even to the extent of reproducing the Chinese text that was verified by the work of Andrew Zheng, the Chinese Christian who accompanied him to Rome, as Henri Havret has indicated.<sup>28</sup> To some extent there is an analogy of Boym's contribution to Kircher's book that Ricci had experienced with Cheng Dayue 程大約. The latter asked Ricci for illustrations based on Western literature that he could reproduce for his book *Cheng shi moyuan* 程氏墨苑 (Ink Garden of Mr. Cheng). The wide distribution of that work made Ricci known in China beyond his own publications.<sup>29</sup> Similarly Kircher needed an illustrated Chinese text of the Monument and an accompanying translation. Indeed, as noted earlier, Kircher had included a Latin translation in his 1636 *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* but in 1667 he sought more than that. Boym's presence in Rome and efforts in translating the Chinese text fittingly filled that need.

As an active and peripatetic missionary in China, Visdelou, on the other hand, was in contact with his confreres in Beijing and in the provinces. His involvement with the Rites Controversy led to his expulsion to Macao and eventually his resid-

<sup>26</sup> Claude de Visdelou, "Monument de la Religion Chrétienne," pp. 318-319.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Havret, S.J., *La Stèle chrétienne de Si-ngan-fou. IIème partie. Histoire du Monument.* (Shanghai: Mission Catholique, 1897), p. 332.

<sup>29</sup> See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York 1984), pp. 11-12.

ing in Pondichéry, India until his death there. A full account of his contributions to nascent Sinology await further study.<sup>30</sup> Yet his comments on using correct romanization of Chinese in French language publications became a reality in his second translation of the Monument. His earlier one was in Latin, but both were based on the Chinese text. By the time his French translation first appeared in 1760 and then again in 1780 and 1781 French interest in China had become an integral component of the Enlightenment and was overshadowing Latin among the scholarly elite in Europe.<sup>31</sup> His knowledge of the early history of China added a new dimension towards understanding the Monument that Boym, because of his other duties as an envoy of the Southern Ming court, was unable to develop further. Nevertheless, this does not diminish Boym's stature in this enterprise since he was the pioneer translator directly from the Chinese text with an explanation for an audience in Europe.

<sup>30</sup> In Pondichéry he wrote a history of the Yuan dynasty, or the Sino-Mongolian dynasty as he called it, and a history of the Huns in which he tentatively linked them to the Xiongnu 匈奴 described in the dynastic histories. He was the author of a history of China translated from Chinese into Latin in six volumes totaling more than 2,200 pages. He was a leading scholar in explaining the origins of the Tartars and their land of Tartary, adding to Europe's knowledge of the Manchus and the Mongols beyond the well publicized *De bello Tartarico* of the Jesuit missionary in China, Martino Martini (1614-1661). Visdelou was not only looking at China's past, but kept up to date on events in China during his lifetime. His translations of some of the last edicts of the Kangxi emperor and several of the early edicts of his successor, the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor, were sent to Propaganda Fide in Rome. In correspondence with Visdelou Pope Clement XI encouraged him to continue to send translations of Chinese materials. See the papal letter of September 30, 1719 in Jordão, *Bullarium*, pp. 183-184. Additional aspects of Visdelou's Chinese studies that still need further examination are in my keynote address, "Rays of Light on Eighteenth-Century China: Claude de Visdelou (Liu Ying 劉應 1656-1737), A Royal Mathematician Sent to Peking" presented to "When China Meets the West" - An International Symposium on Sinology and Sino-West Cultural Relations and Exchanges" at the Institute of English Literature, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China, October 13-16, 2006. Emile Bretschneider (1833-1901) states that Visdelou's translations "show a profound and critical knowledge of the Chinese language" and that he deserves to be called "the father of our knowledge of Chinese historical records," especially the history of the nations of Central and Eastern Asia." E. Bretschneider, *Medieval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, 2 vols. (New York 1967), 1:201.

<sup>31</sup> See Claude de Visdelou, "Traduction du monument chinois concernant la Religion chrétienne," *Journal des Sçavans* (June 1760), pp. 340-352.