

## BISHOP BARTHÉLEMY BRUGUIÈRE (1792–1835)

Kennon Breazeale

Barthélemy Bruguière was from the southwest of France. He was born in the village of Raissac, in the newly created Department of Aude, in 1792, studied at the seminary of Carcassonne, also in the southwest, was ordained as a priest in 1815 and remained at the seminary as a teacher for the next decade. Then he went north to Paris, where he entered the seminary of the French society for foreign missions: the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP).

Under the long-established French system, a priest who wanted to become a missionary did not have to join one of the regular orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans. Instead, as a local parish priest in France, he volunteered for mission work, obtained permission from his bishop, and went to the MEP seminary for a brief period of training, which prepared him for work in a foreign country. Bruguière studied at the seminary in Paris from September 1825 until the following February. He then set out on the long voyage to Asia, and his intended destination was southern Vietnam.

By July 1826 he reached Batavia in northern Java. From there he sailed to Macau, which was the headquarters of the MEP procurer—an administrator who was responsible for providing logistical support to all the MEP missions in Asia, remitting funds and supplies to the bishops and, whenever necessary, reassigning new missionaries to places where priests were most needed. When Bruguière reached Macau, the French mission in Bangkok had only a single missionary. The bishop himself had been the only French priest in the Thai capital for 16 of the previous 17 years, and he was beginning to despair that anyone would ever be sent to Bangkok to take charge of the mission when he died. Bruguière was reassigned to him and set out on a longer journey than he had expected, not stopping in Vietnam but sailing all the way around to the west coast of the Malay peninsula.

He reached Penang on 12 January 1827, at the end of a month-long voyage from Macau, and stayed briefly with the French missionaries, who were in charge of the seminary and the Christian churches on the island. He intended to travel by ship farther up the coast, visiting Christian communities in the region of Takua Pa and in Mergui, and then to follow the short trail across the peninsula to the east coast (at modern Prachuap Khirikhan), continuing north to Phetburi and finally Bangkok. Shipping in those days was not very regular, and he could not get passage as far as Mergui. He therefore changed his plan, went from Penang Island to Kedah, and set out from there, with assistance from the Thai governor,<sup>1</sup> on the long trail through the nearly uninhabited forest to Nakhon Sithammarat.

Bruguière wrote a detailed account of this overland journey, which was published in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* (hereafter APF) in 1828 (APF 3: 242–71). Eye-witness descriptions of this part of the peninsula are relatively rare, in comparison with the much shorter transpeninsular trail from Mergui, and Bruguière provides us with some unique information not found elsewhere. He helps us to imagine what these journeys were like, including a voyage on a Thai ship from Nakhon Sithammarat to Paknam. He also recorded his first impressions of Bangkok and its people—a subject that he would take up again two years later.

### **The French mission since 1767**

At the time of Bruguière's arrival in Bangkok, the French mission was at the lowest ebb in its history. A flourishing mission had developed in the course of a century, beginning with the first French missionaries in 1662 and continuing to the Burmese capture of the old capital at Ayutthaya in 1767. That century has been documented and described in great detail by Adrien Launay (1920) and Alain Forest (1998). The original cathedral, its school and all the seminary facilities were destroyed as a result of the Burmese invasion, and the remaining missionaries were taken into captivity in Burma. One of them, Jacques Corre, managed to escape and found temporary refuge in Chanthaburi and later on the Cambodian coast, before going to the new Thai capital at Thonburi in 1769. He was joined by the new bishop (Olivier Simon Le Bon) and another new missionary (Arnaud-Antoine Garnault) in 1772, but died the following year—before the next priest (Joseph Louis Coudé) arrived from France. King Taksin treated the missionaries well at first, but expelled them in 1779, near the end of his reign. Le Bon went to Goa and died there in 1780. Garnault subsequently worked in the region from Phuket to Penang. He was consecrated in 1787 as the new bishop, but resided in the south until the mid-1790s.

When the new Thai dynasty and capital were established in 1782, there were no French missionaries at all in Bangkok. During the next few years, two worked there, but only briefly. Coudé returned in 1783, but the following year he went to the south, where he fell ill and died. He was buried at the church in Takua Thung. Jacques Liot, who was assigned to Cochinchina (the southern Vietnamese kingdom, under Nguyen rule), fled from his mission in 1784 because of hostilities during the civil war, and took his seminary students to safety in Chanthaburi. He

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<sup>1</sup> The sultanate of Kedah, on the west coast of the Malay peninsula, was a dependency of the Thai kings. In 1821 the sultan fled and sought protection under the British, and a Thai governor, Phraya Aphaithibet (Saeng na Nakhòn), was appointed to Kedah (Chom 1963: 62). Kedah (called Saiburi by the Thai) remained under direct Thai rule until 1839. After a brief transition, the former sultan was restored in 1841. Penang Island belonged to the sultanate but was leased to the British East India Company in 1786.

ministered to the Vietnamese in that provincial town and went to Bangkok, in 1786, where he worked temporarily among the Vietnamese, before returning to his old mission post in 1789.

Esprit-Joseph-Marie Florens, who reached the Siam Mission in 1788, was the only new missionary assigned to Bangkok during the two final decades of the eighteenth century. He was also the last priest to arrive directly from France prior to a long and troubled period, which began in 1789 with the French revolution and ended in 1815 with the final defeat of Napoleon. The next MEP priest to arrive was Jean-Baptiste-René Rabeau, who sailed in 1800 from Gravesend in England and reached the mission in 1801. Rabeau had the misfortune to be on Phuket Island when the Burmese invaded in late 1809. Several months later, he was on board a ship carrying war captives to Burma, was thrown overboard by Muslim crew members and drowned in the Andaman Sea.

When Garnault died in 1811, Florens was the only missionary remaining in Bangkok. As the designated successor, he had to be consecrated by another bishop. Under ordinary circumstances, the principal consecrator would be assisted by two additional bishops. But the small number of prelates in eastern Asia at this time, and the difficulties of travel by sea, made it almost impossible for even two of them to be present on such occasions. Special dispensations were therefore made, so that consecrations could be performed by a single bishop, assisted by two ordinary priests. Florens thus had to go to southern Vietnam, the residence of the nearest bishop, Jean Labartette, Apostolic Vicar of Cochinchina, and was consecrated there in 1812. That year, or in 1813, Florens was joined by an Italian priest named Feretti, who had gone to China in the 1780s and subsequently worked for a year or two with Chinese students at the MEP mission post in Penang, before taking up residence in Bangkok.

The French mission in Bangkok was cut off from its sources of support in France, not only during the troubled period in Europe up to 1815, but also for most of the next decade. In Paris, the MEP Seminary itself was abolished by the Emperor Napoleon in 1809, and its legal status was not restored until 1815. After Rabeau in 1801, no French missionary reached Bangkok until June 1822, when Mathurin Pierre Pécot appeared, after travelling overland from Penang to Nakhon Sithammarat. He stayed slightly less than a year, contracted malaria during a journey back to Penang and died there in July 1823. When the aged Feretti died in November 1825, Florens was again the only European missionary in Bangkok, and the work of the small parishes in the capital was carried on, as it had been throughout the Second Reign, by a few Asian priests, who were ordained by the French bishops and worked in their respective communities. Just before Bruguière's arrival, Florens was assisted by only three local priests, all of them elderly (see APF 2 : 312). Bruguière brought with him a young seminarian from Penang, whom the bishop intended to ordain, and the number of local priests increased in the next

few years. The number reported in an August 1832 letter was seven, although two of them were old and infirm (APF 6: 614–5).

### French mission churches in Bangkok

Bruguière probably began to learn the Thai language as soon as he reached Penang and made contact with the Thai community on the island, which had two Thai monasteries as well as two Catholic churches (*Nouvelles annales des voyages* 1827 : 392). He must have pursued his studies throughout the journey to Bangkok, while he was in the care of servants of the na Nakhòn family, who governed Kedah, Phatthalung and Nakhon Sithammarat. At Bangkok, however, he encountered other languages that had long posed a dilemma for missionaries. Most of the Christians in Bangkok were Chinese, Khmer, Vietnamese and parishioners of mixed Portuguese and Asian ancestry. Few were Thai. The great majority of Christians in the country was concentrated in Bangkok and was settled in four communities that had their own churches in different parts of the city. Some Christians were scattered in other parts of the country, and there was also a large community of Vietnamese Christians in Chanthaburi.

In February 1830, two new missionaries arrived: Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix and Claude-Antoine Deschavannes. Pallegoix was sent to minister to the Christians in Ayutthaya, and while working there he wrote to the directors of the MEP in August 1832 (APF 6: 613–5), describing the churches of the mission as follows:

Nearly 70 years ago the Burmese invaded the kingdom of Siam. The number of Christians who either were carried away into captivity or fled was about 5,000, both Europeans and natives. Quite some years later, some families returned to their native land, and new Christian communities took shape, which have carried on to this day at Bangkok. There are three of them.

First, the camp [residential settlement] of the Conception, composed of about 600 Cambodians, brought as captives from Cambodia about 20 years ago. They have a priest of their nationality, and their chief, called Benait, was raised to the rank of a mandarin last year....<sup>2</sup>

Second, the camp of the Holy Cross [Santa Cruz], composed of about 450 descendants of Portuguese, Siamese, Chinese and Cochinchinese [southern Vietnamese]. Their old church, which looks like a barn, is built of rotted planks and is falling into ruins. They are constructing a new one of brick, which is not yet finished.

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<sup>2</sup> The spelling perhaps should be Benoît (the French counterpart for Benedict). Apparently he was appointed in 1831 in succession to the elderly head of this Luso-Khmer community, Phraya Wiset Songkram, whose Christian name was Miguel and who was described six years earlier by the second British envoy (Burney 1971 ii–4: 90). This church seems to be the one listed in 1822 as Santa Anna by the first British envoy (Crawfurd 1968: 162).

Third and finally, the camp of the Assumption, where there is a beautiful church, the cathedral of the Apostolic Vicar, built 15 years ago, by means of an ample donation sent from America for its construction.<sup>3</sup> A college of 15 Siamese students is there, and 140 Christians are scattered in the vicinity of the garden of the bishop. They are of diverse nationalities, descendants of Portuguese, Chinese, Siamese and Cochinchinese.

At Chanthaburi, a small old town near the sea, there is a Cochinchinese Christian community of 620 people, with a priest of their nationality. In the part of Cambodia subject to the king of Siam [the Battambang region, which had a governor appointed by the king], there are about 200 Cambodian Christians, to whom the Apostolic Vicar is going to send a priest without delay. There are, moreover, some 100 Christians dispersed here and there, even up to the northern-most town, Pitsiloque [Phitsanulok], inappropriately named ‘Pourselouc’ on our French maps. The number of [Asian] priests of the country is seven, but two are very old and feeble. There are now only two European missionaries in Siam: Mgr. Florens (the Apostolic Vicar, feeble and aged 70) and me. Deschavannes, to whom God gave only one year in this mission...contracted a pestilential fever [malaria] that took him from us in 15 days [in September 1831].

Pallegoix does not refer to any other church in this 1832 description. Bruguière's 1827 description mentions a fourth church, which was identified a year earlier by the British envoy, Henry Burney, as St. Rosario (Burney 1971 ii–4: 89). This church, also known as Nossa Senhora do Rosario (Our Lady of the Rosary) and as Calvary, had been formed by a schismatic group. In the mid–1780s, they broke away from the church of the Holy Cross (Santa Cruz), which is on the west bank of the river, and moved a short distance down-river and to the opposite bank, not far from the site where the Portuguese consulate was established in 1820. This group refused to recognise the authority of the French bishops and appealed numerous times to the Portuguese bishops in Macau and the Archbishops in Goa for a Portuguese priest, but without success. They were finally reconciled with the French mission about five years before Bruguière arrived. According to a much later description by Pallegoix, their original church was wooden and was rebuilt in a Chinese style (Pallegoix 2000: 407), perhaps reflecting ties with Macau.

There was no Vietnamese church in Bangkok in Bruguière's time, although many Vietnamese resided in the city. Not long after his departure, however, a large number of Vietnamese captives were taken to Bangkok, following the Thai military operations in the lower Mekong area in 1834. They were settled on the north side of the city, near the Khmer Christian settlement, where they founded the fifth church: St. Francis Xavier.

<sup>3</sup> According to Hilaire Courvézy, who succeeded Florens as Apostolic Vicar and was writing only two years later, the initial funds for the Church of the Immaculate Conception were received from a cardinal in Rome, who specified that the church must be dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Half of the construction cost, however, was contributed by a Portuguese friend of Florens in Bengal and by donations from Christians in Penang (APF 8: 104; APF 11: 526–7).

Many letters were selected for publication in the French missionary journal because they described the everyday lives of missionaries and their parishioners, or important (often tragic) events affecting them. In the case of Thailand, however, we learn relatively little from the journal about the day-to-day work of the priests. Moreover, the published letters provide almost no clues to the dramatic political events that were taking place at the time of Bruguière's arrival in Bangkok.

### Major political events in 1827

The ship carrying Bruguière reached the mouth of the river on Sunday, 3 June 1827. During the previous week-end (although the news would not reach Bangkok for some time), Thai forces had entered and taken possession of the city of Vientiane, thereby bringing a rapid end to a war with the largest of the Lao kingdoms. In the second half of February 1827, while Bruguière was still at Penang, news had reached Bangkok of movements of Lao forces in the river valley between Lom Sak and Saraburi, and the arrival at Nakhon Ratchasima of the Lao king with his army. Thai officials issued orders immediately for a general mobilisation, and governors in places as far away as Songkhla were summoned to the capital. A messenger from Bangkok reached Songkhla probably in the second week of March 1827, carrying orders for the governor to mobilise all forces available.<sup>4</sup> The governor of Songkhla hastened to Bangkok with ships and 1,000 men (Chom 1963: 62). The governor of Nakhon Sithammarat (Nòi na Nakhòn) sent more ships and about 2,000 men under the command of his son, the governor of Phatthalung (Thiphakòrawong 1934: 50).

Bruguière's description of his journey to Bangkok provides no hint that any of these events were taking place, and the reader is left unaware of the upheaval and the fact that Bruguière arrived in the midst of a major war. The reason for his smooth passage is that he was in the care of the powerful na Nakhòn family, all the way from Penang through the forest to Nakhon Sithammarat, and from there to Bangkok by ship. His description of his meeting with Nòi na Nakhòn, north of Phatthalung, conveys the impression of a governor conducting business as usual and travelling leisurely towards the town where one of his sons was the governor. In fact, Nòi could not lead forces to Bangkok in person. He had to delegate that duty to others, because he was already under orders to carry out another political mission, likewise missing from the published records by and about Bruguière.

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<sup>4</sup> Edict from the Kalahom Minister to Phraya Wichian Khiri (governor of Songkhla), 23 February 1827, and minute dated 31 March 1827 concerning the messenger (National Library, Bangkok, Manuscripts Division, document R3/1182/2).

Nòi na Nakhòn had been closely involved in the negotiations between the Thai ministers and the British envoy, Henry Burney, who was in Bangkok from December 1825 to July 1826 to conclude a treaty of commerce. Burney's ship took him back to Bengal, for ratification of the treaty by the British governor general, and was expected to return to the west coast of the peninsula in early 1827. An agreement had been made with the British for Nòi to bring the copy of the treaty bearing the king's seal and to meet Burney on the west coast, for the formal exchange of ratifications. We learn from Bruguière's account that he met Nòi along the trail through the forest in May 1827. From Phatthalung, Nòi must have taken a trail that led almost due west across the mountains into Trang Province, where he met Burney two or three weeks later. While that meeting was taking place, Bruguière was sailing north from Nakhon Sithammarat, and the Thai forces were approaching Vientiane.

Under ordinary circumstances, a foreigner such as Bruguière, who might well have been a spy in disguise, would have been stopped at the mouth of the river and possibly held under guard. In addition to the immediate emergency created by the war, Thai officials had been carrying out construction work for more than a year to strengthen their coastal defences. Fears of a British naval attack on Bangkok were unfounded, but had persisted ever since the British invasion of Burma three years earlier. Since Bruguière went up-river to the bishop's residence on the day after reaching the mouth of the river, he clearly was not detained. Again, the reason must be that he was treated almost as an official guest. He was travelling with the Thai representative who had accompanied Burney to Bengal and back to Penang. The ship, moreover, must have belonged to the governor of Nakhon Sithammarat, may have been carrying supplies to assist with the war against Vientiane and would therefore have received special treatment by the authorities on arrival.

Although we learn almost nothing from Bruguière about the war, he had plans for going to Vientiane himself. Soon after he reached Bangkok, he reported to colleagues in Penang that he might go to 'the Lao kingdom', where no missionary had yet been sent (APF 3: 271–2). At first glance, it would seem unlikely that he was referring to Vientiane, because of the war, and that he was referring to another of the Lao kingdoms: Luang Prabang or perhaps even Chiang Mai. Two years later, however, Bruguière identified the destination more precisely. He was offered the opportunity to go up to the Mekong, although at the time he could not be spared from the work in Bangkok. A governor who was setting out in 1829, for his new post, offered to take a missionary with him and build a church (APF 5: 42).

Bruguière thought the governor was going to Vientiane (which had been abandoned by that time), but the destination must have been the new administrative centre down-river. The potential benefactor was probably the first governor of Nong Khai, Phra Prathum Thewa (Suwò), also known as Chao Suwanna Wongsa, who was a grandson of a king of Champasak. Suwò held office from the end of

the 1827–8 war with Vientiane until his death in March 1853,<sup>5</sup> but in spite of his friendly gesture, no missionaries went into this region during his lifetime. This plan for opening a new mission field, like some of Bruguière's other hopes, had to wait for future generations. Nearly half a century passed before the French missionaries had the resources necessary to pursue it and open a mission on the central Mekong. In Bruguière's time, there were too few priests even for the most urgent work of ministering to the Christian communities in the capital and teaching in the schools sponsored by the churches.

### **Bruguière as a teacher**

After his seminary days, Bruguière taught in Carcassonne for a decade. In Bangkok, he applied his talents as an exceptionally well qualified teacher. The modern Assumption College was founded more than a half century later, but its forerunner in the late 1820s, the school attached to the Church of the Assumption, had already become a centre of general education. Bruguière, who taught there for more than three and a half years, can be counted among its first professors.

An important function of this educational institution was the theological training it provided to students who were destined to serve the Church and, for the gifted few, to pursue advanced studies and be ordained as priests. It also provided educational opportunities for laymen, some of whom entered Thai government service and were highly valued by King Rama III. The British envoy described several men who were involved with the British party in 1825 and 1826, and observed that the local Portuguese community received more favourable treatment by the Thai government than any other group of foreign origin. He attributed these privileges to their long history of loyal service, especially in the fighting against foreign invaders, and their service in various departments of the government (Burney 1971 ii–4: 88–90).

One of Bruguière's contemporaries outlined the major problems faced by the French missionaries in Bangkok: lack of manpower and financial resources, official resistance to conversion by Thai Buddhists, and the number of languages needed for work among other ethnic groups, reporting that 17 languages were spoken in Bangkok alone (APF 11: 535–40). Bruguière himself had no illusions from the outset. He did not regard the Thai as likely candidates for conversion. He observed the cosmopolitan character of Bangkok's population, composed as it was of large numbers of traders, refugees and war captives, and concluded:

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<sup>5</sup> For a biography of this governor, see *Prawat thao suwò* (1969). For the date of his death, see *Phongsawadan yò müiang wiangchan* (1969: 150–1).

...the real Siamese [Thai] do not make up the majority of the country's population. The largest number of inhabitants is a collage of Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Lao, Peguans [Mon], Malay and so on. It is among them that one can hope to make new Christians (APF 5: 41).

Bruguière, like some other writers, insisted that the majority of the population of Bangkok were not Thai. His young colleague Pallegoix thought that half the population was Chinese, Malay and Lao (APF 6: 595). Regardless of whether their impressions were correct, the mission itself was confined mostly to the urban area of Bangkok, where the proportion of potential converts was larger than in the countryside—far larger than the resources of the mission could manage for the foreseeable future.

### Consecration as a bishop, 1829

Florens had long been concerned about the survival of the French mission. Bruguière happened to arrive in Bangkok on Florens' sixty-fifth birthday and in the fortieth year of his work in the kingdom. Few of the bishop's predecessors had survived to work so long as a missionary, and Florens had already appealed to the directors in Paris for a successor. The arrival of Bruguière, aged thirty-five, brought hope for continuity. Bruguière was nominated by the MEP in Paris as coadjutor of the Siam Mission (that is, the designated successor to the bishop as Apostolic Vicar), and papal briefs of 5 February 1828 appointed him to this position and made him a bishop.

Given the slow communications at that time, the news of his appointment and the papal bulls did not reach him until the following year. Florens described the grand occasion of the consecration of the new bishop, the first to be conducted in the country since the Ayutthaya period, in a letter to the directors of the MEP in Paris (APF 5: 49–50):

On the 8th of May [1829], I received your letter and the letters from Rome that accompanied it, and I thank you very much. At last, my prayers are answered. You have foreseen my wishes, and you have done something that is quite agreeable to me in obtaining the nomination of Bruguière as my coadjutor. My letters to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, requesting him, had left here three months before his nomination. Thus you see that our wishes were the same. This dear colleague, after resisting for a long time, finally submitted himself to the will of God manifested in the voice of his superiors. His consecration took place on the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul [29 June 1829].

The ceremony was the most stately that has ever been witnessed in these lands. It was attended by a great number of idolaters—Siamese, Chinese and others—as well as by the Phra Khlang, who is the first minister of the king of Siam, ac-

accompanied by his brother and his sister, wife of the king.<sup>6</sup> Everything took place with great order and the greatest decorum. The Phra Khlang and his brother were perched on the bare wall of the new church, in the open air, with hard seats on the bricks.

I am now at the heights of joy, and I shall die in peace, since I have a successor. I await an opportunity to send him to visit [the seminary in] Penang. The title with which he was consecrated is the Bishop of Capsa *in pártibus*.

The title may appear puzzling today, but at that time there was no ‘Bishop of Siam’. Like all the Apostolic Vicars, Bruguière was given the title of a place which, long ago, had been Christian and the seat of a bishop, but was, in his day, in the lands of unbelievers (*in pártibus infidélum*). Capsa had been a diocese in northern Africa and is now the oasis town of Gafsa in Tunisia. Florens was titular bishop of Sozopolis, a place in the Turkish Empire, now known as Sozopol, on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea. Neither he nor any of his predecessors ever went (or were even expected to go) to the dioceses after which they were named. Florens administered the Siam Mission as an Apostolic Vicar: a bishop serving outside his nominal diocese and ‘on mission’ to spread the Faith in Asia. The Apostolic Vicariate was not a regular diocese and, until the modern national boundaries were fixed, did not have a precise territorial definition. This system continued until 1965, when an archbishop was appointed for Thailand, and a regular diocese system with bishops was created.

## Departure for Singapore, 1831

Pierre Badailh came up from Penang to Bangkok, adding a third missionary to share the work temporarily during the year 1829. Then in February 1830, the long-awaited reinforcements from France finally appeared: Deschavannes and Pallegoix. In February 1831, with these two new missionaries expecting to remain permanently at the side of Florens, Bruguière left Bangkok to go to two other seaports that were under the jurisdiction of the Siam Mission. It was late in the sailing season for a voyage to the south, and because of contrary winds, his ship did not reach his first destination, Singapore, until early April 1831.

There he confronted Father Francisco da Silva Pinto e Maia, a Portuguese priest who had arrived in Singapore in 1825, with authorisation from the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, and was nominally under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese Bishop of Melaka. A February 1831 letter from Florens, carried by Bruguière, in-

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<sup>6</sup> The brothers were Chao Phraya Phra Khlang (Dit Bunnag), who was acting minister 1822–4 and minister 1824–51, and Phraya Si Phiphat (That Bunnag), who was a senior official in the ministry. The Phra Khlang was the ministry in charge of foreign affairs, maritime trade and the administration of the eastern seaboard (the coastal provinces from Samut Sakhon to Chanthaburi).

formed Maia that the Holy See had given jurisdiction over Singapore to the Siam Mission, in a decree of 16 July 1827 (Teixeira 1961: 764). The French, however, had never tried to establish a church on the island, although one MEP missionary, Laurent Joseph Marius Imbert, who taught briefly at the Penang college, had reported to Florens on the need for a missionary there. His observations were made while passing through Singapore in 1821, only two years after the British administration was established on the island. When Bruguière arrived, Maia was in sole possession, refused (like most Portuguese priests) to accept the authority of a French bishop and was to cause much trouble for Florens and his immediate successors for the next two decades. Unable to accomplish anything, Bruguière continued on his journey almost immediately.

### **Interlude at the General College, 1831–2**

Later in April 1831, he reached Penang, where he joined the four other French missionaries and one Italian who were stationed there, and began teaching at the MEP seminary, known as the General College. Michel Charles Lolivier, who formerly worked in China, had been appointed the Superior of the college in 1808 and had been there from the beginning. The Italian Father Conforti, who likewise had experience in China, had taught in Penang since ca. 1812–4 but was not an MEP missionary. Jean-Baptiste Boucho had worked in Penang since 1824, Jean Pierre Barbe since 1826 and Jacques Honoré Chastan since 1828. All of them except Chastan were in Penang at the time of Bruguière's first visit as a newly arriving missionary. Now he had returned as a bishop and was certainly the best qualified among them as a teacher of theology.

The French missionaries in Penang belonged to the Siam Mission and were under the jurisdiction of the bishop in Bangkok. In contrast to Singapore, which had been founded by the British only a dozen years before Bruguière's visit there, Penang had a well established MEP contingent, and its college had a long history before moving to the island. The college could trace its origins to the training of Asian students by French priests at Ayutthaya in the 1660s, soon after the arrival of the first MEP missionaries in the country. From the outset, the Ayutthaya seminary had trained students for service to the Church in all the missions of the MEP in Asia, and in the late-Ayutthaya period, French bishops in Vietnam and China were sending boys to Ayutthaya for a general education, leading ultimately to theological training. These students then returned to work in their home countries.

During a period of four decades, the teachers and students of the original General College were forced to migrate several times. As the Burmese forces began to close in upon Ayutthaya, in the initial phase of the invasion of 1765, the seminarians were evacuated to Chanthaburi, and a safe haven for them was soon found on the coast of Cambodia, near the present-day boundary with Vietnam. The

seminarians later moved to the French colony of Pondichéry, on the east coast of India. Eventually, Penang Island came under consideration as a permanent home.

In 1786 the British took possession of the island of Penang and established a trading station there, under a leasehold arrangement with the Sultan of Kedah. As noted above, Kedah was a dependency of the Thai king, it had already been officially added to the Apostolic Vicariate of Siam by a papal brief in 1784, and Christians continued to migrate to Penang during the following decades. Many of them were refugees, from the last Burmese invasion of Phuket in late 1809, and had settled in a part of Penang called Pulo Tikus (the Island of Rats). A new site for the General College was under debate, because Pondichéry proved to be uneconomical and inconvenient. The college was intended to serve all the bishops sponsored by the MEP in Asia, and at this time there were five apostolic vicariates: the Malabar Mission (with its seat at Pondichéry), Siam, southern Vietnam (with responsibility for part of Cambodia), northern Vietnam and China's Sichuan Province. A decision was taken to move to Penang, and Lolivier, a missionary in China's Fujian Province, was appointed Superior of the General College at Penang in June 1808. He remained in Penang until his death in December 1833, and was there when Bruguière arrived, first in January 1827 and again in April 1831.

Like the bishop in Bangkok, the missionaries in Penang were cut off from resources of money and personnel in France, both before and after the college moved to the new site. For its survival and renewal in Penang, the General College depended partly on contributions from Spanish churches in Manila and from America (Henrion 1847 iv: 642), until the MEP could resume its support in the post-Napoleonic era.

When Bruguière joined the college in 1831, Penang had five other missionaries, making it the largest contingent in the Siam Mission. His experience in teaching, especially at the advanced level of theological studies, was a great advantage for the students. The presence of a bishop added a certain prestige to the college. It also meant that students could be ordained as priests—a function that only a bishop could perform—without having to travel long distances. By this time, however, the operations no longer followed the intended plan. The head of the Sichuan Mission was the only bishop who was sending students, and it had become essentially a Chinese college. The other bishops preferred to manage their own schools, because it was less costly to do so (APF 7: 536).

### **Preparations for a mission in Korea**

By the time he left Bangkok in 1831 for Penang, Bruguière had renewed hopes of becoming a pioneer in an entirely new mission field. It appeared that the missions in Asia were prospering. The MEP directors reported that 19 priests left Paris during 1830 and 1831 (APF 5: 555). The MEP's five Asian missions now had

56 missionaries, whereas during Bruguière's time at the Paris seminary in 1825 they had only 25. Pallegoix and Deschavannes had reached Bangkok during 1830, the number of Asian priests had increased and the Bangkok mission received a modest increase in funding from the MEP while Bruguière was there. At this juncture in his career, Bruguière was offered the possibility of opening and developing a mission field that had been proposed and discussed for more than three decades: the Korean peninsula.

According to Bruguière, when he was a boy in France he had heard about the conversions of some Koreans by priests who worked in China, and he had been inspired by these new Christians, who lived in a land where no European missionary had been sent (APF 9: 196). In the 1790s, François Claude Letondal, as MEP Procurer in Macau, had been calling for the establishment of a mission in Korea. He was very active in the establishment of the General College at Penang and took Chinese students there himself in 1809 and 1811. Letondal's proposal may have come to Bruguière's attention, during his days at the seminary in Carcassonne, and it would have been a subject of his training at the MEP seminary in Paris. No doubt Bruguière's interest in Korea was also stimulated by Letondal's colleague Lolivier, the Superior of the General College, during Bruguière's brief visit to Penang in 1827 and while he was working at the college during 1831–2. The Penang College had another connection with Korea, because Imbert, who taught at the college around 1821, had already volunteered to serve in Korea if a mission were established there. At that time, however, the MEP had neither the money nor priests to open a new mission, and after leaving Penang, Imbert worked in northern Vietnam and eventually settled at the Sichuan Mission in China. By the late 1820s, however, the resources seemed to be available.

While he was still in Bangkok in 1829, Bruguière received a letter from the MEP directors, dated 1828, in which they discussed the proposal for creating a mission in Korea and offered to recommend him to take charge of it. Florens supported this plan (APF 9: 196), even though Bruguière's departure would leave the Siam Mission with no coadjutor to take charge when Florens died. Bruguière thus had hopes of a much greater role in the MEP, and he wrote to Macau, asking Pierre Louis Legrégeois (Procurer of the MEP) and Raphael Umpières (the Procurer of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) for their advice, asking them to provide him with as much information as possible about Korea. He was already a consecrated bishop and could, if named by Rome, immediately take charge of an apostolic vicariate. The Sacred Congregation in Rome had not yet made a decision concerning Korea, however, and Bruguière remained in doubt about the proposals. When he reached Penang in April 1831, he had not received any further news about Korea.

Two papal briefs, dated 9 September 1831, created the Apostolic Vicariate of Korea and named him Apostolic Vicar. These decisions were announced in the

January 1832 issue of the missionary journal in France (APF 5: 355), but another six months passed before the news reached Penang. At the beginning of July 1832, Bruguière received a very brief letter from Umpières in Macau, informing him that everything was in order for him to go to Korea and that, as coadjutor in Siam, he should name someone to take charge of the Siam Mission if the elderly Florens died before a successor arrived (APF 9: 198–9).<sup>7</sup> At this point, Bruguière was aware of his appointment but had heard nothing from the MEP directors. Finally, on 25 July 1832 he received a letter from Paris, which ended his doubts. It confirmed that the Korea Mission had been officially established and that he had been appointed to take charge of it with the approval of the MEP.

He quickly made preparations for his departure, and decided to take with him Joseph Wang, a Penang seminary student who was to accompany him on the long journey to the new mission field. He also received encouragement from Chastan, a fellow priest of the Siam Mission, who had worked at Penang since 1828 and who now volunteered to serve with Bruguière in Korea, but planned to travel to China at a later time.

### **Odyssey across China, 1832–5**

On 12 September 1832, Bruguière and Joseph Wang sailed from Singapore. They were fortunate to cross paths there with Pierre Julien Marc Clémenceau, a new missionary en route from France to Bangkok, who had just arrived in the British colony. Lacking the money needed for the voyage, Bruguière had to borrow from his young colleague (APF 9: 199). Unable to get direct passage to China at a reasonable cost, Bruguière and Joseph went first to Manila and found a ship to take them onward to Macau, where they arrived 17 October (APF 9: 199–201, 205). There, they had both Legrégeois and Umpières to provide funds, logistical support and advice for the journey across China. Bruguière also must have received help from Jean Baptiste Torrette, who was the Procurer of the French Lazarists (priests of the Congregation of the Mission, also known as Vincentians). The Lazarists had missions in the north of China, in the regions through which Bruguière would have to travel en route to Korea and where the MEP Procurer had little means of providing logistical support.

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, the successor had already been named and was en route. Hilaire Courvézy left France in March 1832, destined for Bangkok. The following month a papal brief named him Bishop of Bida (an ancient town, seat of a lapsed diocese in Mauritania in northwest Africa) and coadjutor for Siam. He was consecrated in Bangkok at the end of November 1833. Four months later, at the end of March 1834, Mgr. Florens died.

In February 1833 Bruguière sailed up the coast from Macau to Fujian, where he stayed at the Spanish Dominican mission, and then continued by ship to the coast of Zhejiang Province. He made part of his journey north through China on the Grand Canal, going ashore near Nanjing and then continuing in the direction of Beijing. At the beginning of September, more than two weeks after crossing the Yellow River, he was warned that it would be too dangerous to go to the Chinese capital, because of persecutions against Christians, and that he would surely be arrested and put to death if he attempted to make the journey on to Korea. He was thus obliged to turn west, and seek help from the Italian bishop in Shanxi Province. Although received and sheltered in Shanxi for almost a year, his arrival there in October was viewed with trepidation: it was feared that the mission would be in danger if the authorities became aware of the goals of his journey across China. Bruguière did not report ever being stopped by the authorities, and his movements through China appear to have been secretive, from one safe shelter to another, using the network of missions and assistance from Chinese Christians.

While Bruguière was still in Fujian, he had sent Joseph on an investigative mission. Joseph went to Beijing, made contacts there, continued north beyond the Great Wall, began to identify routes across the northeast of China and then rejoined Bruguière on the coast of Zhejiang Province. From Shanxi, Joseph made several trips to Beijing and back, to make more contacts. He did not reach Shanxi for the last time until September 1834, bringing the information necessary for Bruguière to make a definite plan for the next stages of his journey. He would travel along a safe route north of Beijing to the next mission shelter. From there, Joseph would have to make further arrangements for the entry into Korea and for assistance by Christians along the way.

Bruguière left Shanxi on 22 September 1834, reached the Great Wall on 7 October and arrived on 8 October at Xiwanzi.<sup>8</sup> Some Christians had fled to this place during a period of persecution, and the village was mostly Christian. The French Lazarists had a church there, which they called their 'Mongolian' mission. At Xiwanzi, Bruguière rejoined Pierre-Philibert Maubant, whom he had met after arriving in Macau.

Maubant was a new MEP missionary, originally bound for Sichuan, and he travelled by ship from Macau with Bruguière. At Fujian, he announced that he wanted to volunteer for the Korea Mission. He remained in Fujian during 1833, passed through Beijing in the spring of 1834 and then went to Xiwanxi, where he

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<sup>8</sup> Xiwanzi is called Sivang in most French sources. It is shown on an 1837 map of the missions in China as Si-ouen-tze (Sivang) in APF 10 (frontispiece of issue number 55, November 1837). Chinese characters for Xiwanzi and the names of many other places visited by Bruguière are provided in the volume by Joseph van den Brandt (1936).

studied Chinese and awaited Bruguière. The two missionaries remained in Xiwanzi for the next year, again not specifically for mission work but making preparations and waiting for Joseph to complete all the arrangements in the course of additional trips to Beijing and back.

## Entering Korea

The three years spent in China are the story of Joseph Wang more than of Bruguière. From the outset in late 1832, Joseph had been sent north to Beijing, ahead of Bruguière. He paved the way for a successful entry to Korea by identifying routes and making contacts with Korean and Chinese Christians, who could facilitate the bishop's journey. The long delays in Shanxi and Xiwang were due in part to the uncertainties arising from political changes in Korea, following the death of the old king in December 1834 and the establishment of a regency for his young grandson, King Hon Jong. Much time was also needed for the numerous trips that Joseph made to and from Beijing in his efforts to arrange a safe passage across Chinese territory and a safe refuge after the priests entered Korea. Bruguière was aware that the Korean king sent tribute annually to Beijing and that some of the men in the entourages of the Korean envoys were Christians. These were the contacts most eagerly sought by Joseph, but since the tribute bearers came only once a year, it took nearly three years to make all the arrangements, which included special clothing for Bruguière to wear when he slipped across the Korean frontier.

Finally, all the arrangements were in place for the long-awaited entry to Korea. On 7 October 1835, Bruguière, Joseph and Maubant set out from Xiwanzi, along the route across Liaoning Province. After passing through Shenyang, they followed the main road that led towards the Korean frontier. One night they stopped at a Christian farmhouse in the countryside. The next morning, 20 October 1835, Bruguière suddenly became ill, and he died within the hour.<sup>9</sup> He was buried on a nearby hillside.

The epilogue to the bishop's story is filled with tragedy for the Korea Mission. Bruguière's travelling companions continued on their journey and reached Seoul. Maubant was later joined there by Imbert, who had taught briefly at the

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<sup>9</sup> Just before leaving Xiwanzi, Bruguière completed a detailed account of his departure from the Siam Mission in 1832 and his travels through China during the next three years. It was sent in a letter to the MEP directors and was published in the French missionary journal in 1836 (APF 9: 196–331). This account is the main source for the brief summary of the travels in China provided in this article. A report of his death was published in the same issue (APF 9: 332). The place where he died was called Makiatzen by the French. Liu Ming, of the University of Hawaii's economics department, who is a native of Liaoning Province, suggests (in a personal communication) that the pinyin for this name may be Majiazhen, meaning the little rural township (*zhen*) of the Ma family (Ma-jia).

Penang College in the early 1820s and had volunteered at the beginning of his career to work in Korea. To this group was added another old member of the Siam Mission: Chastan, who worked at Penang during 1828–33 and had promised Bruguière that he would go to Korea. Chastan had made an independent but unsuccessful attempt to enter Korea in 1834, without laying the foundations that Joseph Wang did, and he withdrew to Shandong Province for two years before finally joining his colleagues. These three priests were arrested by the Korean authorities and executed in September 1839, together with a large number of Korean Christians. The fact that news of this massacre was unknown to the missionaries in Beijing until January 1843 (APF 15: 449) reflects the extreme isolation of this place.

Nearly a century later, Bruguière finally reached his destination. In 1931, for the centenary of the founding of the mission in Korea, his remains were moved from his original resting place and reburied in a cemetery in Seoul. Like many missionaries, he adopted a name that would be familiar to the local people, and this name was inscribed on the tombstone in Seoul: Su (蘇) in Chinese or So in Korean pronunciation.

A concise history of the Korean mission, published in the May 1847 issue of the APF (19: 213–21), mentioned Bruguière only briefly. It did not credit him with any role in the founding of the French mission, but did attempt to portray, in a dramatic way, his final moments in the attempt to reach Korea:

On the border of the peninsula, [Father] Maubant paid his last respects to his bishop, Mgr. Bruguière, the Apostolic Vicar of Korea, who, after wandering for a long time in the empty places of Mongolia [ie, beyond the Great Wall], often with nowhere to lay his head and without shelter, died in a poor thatched cottage, in sight of his woe-begone mission. (APF 19: 219).

Bruguière died in obscurity during a long and hard journey, before he reached his new mission. By contrast, his companion, Maubant, was martyred in Korea, beatified and eventually canonised, and he acquired an important place in mission history. If Bruguière had remained at his post as coadjutor and had succeeded Florens as apostolic vicar, he might have been remembered as an educator and scholar. One intellectual accomplishment of his days in Bangkok is his description of Thailand and its people, written in the year of his consecration and published in English translation in this volume of the *Journal of the Siam Society*. He might have refined and expanded this long essay into a book, and it might have become a basic reference work about the country in the nineteenth century. But Bruguière was unlucky in this respect, too, and gained little recognition for his intellectual efforts. These honours eventually went to his young colleague Pallegoix, who became bishop-coadjutor in 1838, Apostolic Vicar in 1841 and the author of a much acclaimed book in 1854.

Barthélemy Bruguière gained no martyrdom, no fame as an author and no place in history for establishing new missions. During his residence in Bangkok, he ministered to the Christian communities and sought converts among non-Thai groups. Perhaps his most important contributions, largely unchronicled and long forgotten, were as a skilled teacher in the schools provided by the French missionaries.

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Portrait of Barthélemy Bruguière,  
ca. 1825 Courtesy of M.E.P.



Tombstone of Barthélemy Bruguière in Seoul

*Translation of the inscription in Chinese*  
Tomb of Mr. So, bishop

*Translation of the inscription in Latin*  
Barthélemy Bruguière  
of the Diocese of Carcassonne  
Titular Bishop of Capsa  
First Apostolic Vicar of Korea  
died in Mongolia on 20 October 1835  
at the age of 44  
transferred Anno Domini 1931