



Auguste Borget A Year in China (1838-1839)

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Three exhibitions of drawings and paintings by Auguste Borget were recently held in Issoudun, in 1999, 2007 and 2008.¹ The last two were justified by the bicentenary of his birth and were dedicated to a major aspect of his work; his sketches and watercolours. For some visitors, these exhibitions represented an opportunity to discover an artist recognised as part of the history of the painting of landscapes and exotic places.

But this relative celebrity has been accompanied by a certain misunderstanding regarding the motivations of the painter. Borget the man continues to be largely unknown. By following in his footsteps during his travels in China for a year, from the summer of 1838 to the summer of 1839, we have attempted to become

better acquainted with the sensitive and refined artist concealed behind his works who reveals his emotions in his drawings executed directly from life. It is necessary to go in search of this timid and restless man, who hides himself away and yet also, at times, places himself in the centre of *A Landscape of Hong Kong*.² Our first intention here is not to seduce the art lover, but to capture a few moments of contemplation, as if in a diary.³

From the very beginning, Borget had a detached approach; he was a nomad, a discoverer, a humanist. The man of letters Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896) speaks of him with praise: 'one of the few painters who went to study nature in China ... M. Borget spent several years in China, in the midst of all sorts of achievements; only a great love for his native country must have prevented him from becoming a first class Mandarin.'⁴ There is no risk of confusing him with the majority of professional and amateur artists who came from Europe to tread the tourist path in China and harvest images from which to make a commercial profit upon their return home. Borget, in contrast, became enamoured of this region and wanted to stay and live there, as he confesses in his letters. His vision of China, however does not concern easy exoticism, it shows sincerity and a loyalty to the Chinese reality which he endeavoured to understand from within. His works are not a recuperation, but a celebration.

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE ARTIST

The son of a prosperous trader, André-Auguste Borget (1808-1877) was born in Issoudun, a small town in Indre. His first drawing teacher was Boichard senior, a former pupil of Regnault, who excelled above all in landscapes. Regnault had previously been a cabin boy in the American merchant navy. A curious stroke of fate ensured that the future teacher of Borget, the seascape painter Baron Jean Antoine Gudin, also joined the same American merchant navy ... before turning towards the Fine Arts! These bibliographical details make one think that it was perhaps from his teachers that Borget gained his taste for the high seas.

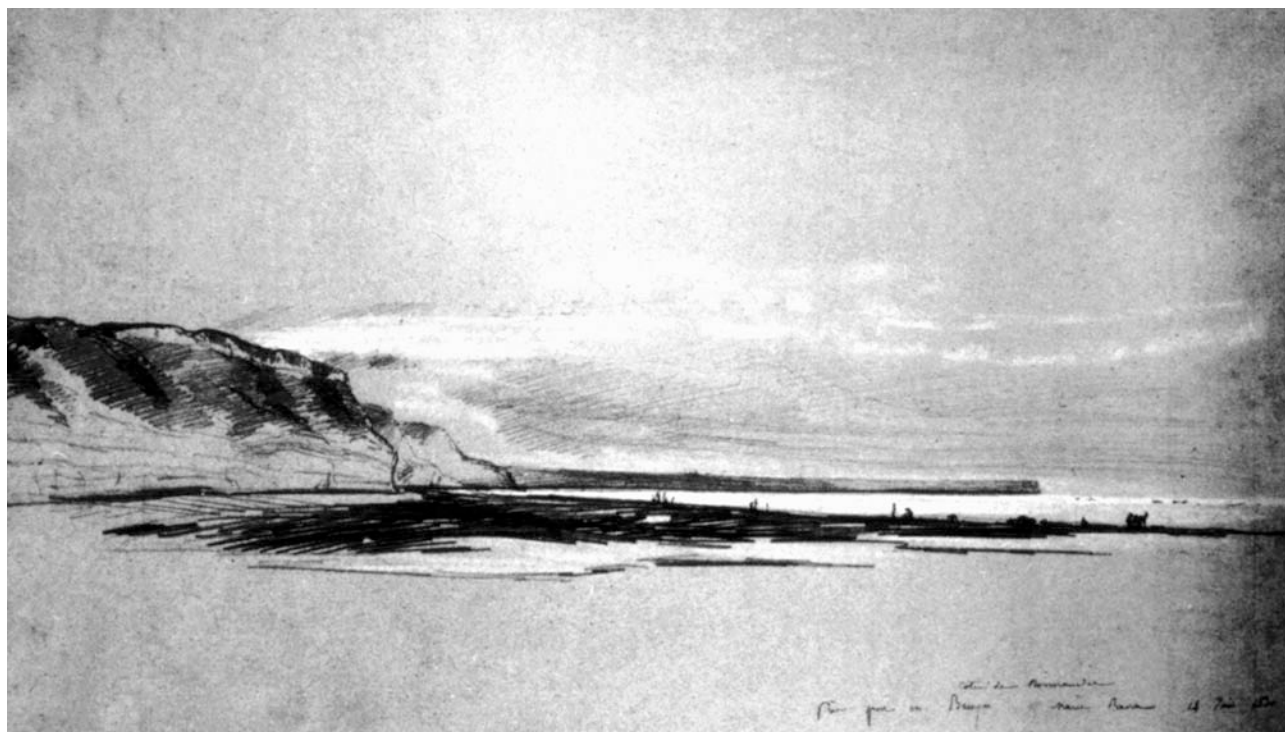
However, he waited for three years until he officially became an adult, working in a bank but never renouncing his vocation of painting. This is where we find a first indication of the character of Borget; although very reserved, he was fiery and obstinate. He never tried to deny this trait of character. On the contrary, the artist was aware of his double personality and, retrospectively at the end of his life, he revealed in a published confession the contradictions of his youth.⁵

There were also traces in him of romantic egotism. He liked to represent himself as a solitary onlooker, leaning over a balustrade, something he could have identified with.

Finally, in 1829 he left his family. In Paris, he found the artistic teaching and creative freedom that he dreamed of. This freedom was developed through his new discovery of landscape.

The turning point between the classical tradition of landscape painting—still greatly influential at that time—and its new lease on life, already evident in the romantic innovations in this area, was around 1830. The young landscape artists of that time drew their inspiration from the 17th century Dutch painters and from the English contemporary artists, especially John Constable (1776-1837). Under the French Restoration, the young generation threw itself into an exalted search for a destiny with, if possible, an historical impact—whether happy or cruel. It found its leader in Byron. As Jacques Thuillier wrote, they question everything: society, religion, love, all that Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), a close friend of Borget, was one day to call the *Human comedy*.⁶ New artistic approaches appeared: the naturalism of the Barbizon school in the 1830s and

Plate 1. *Port-en-Bessin*, pencil and white gouache highlights, inscribed and dated lower right: '*Côte de Normandie Près port en Bessin marée Basse 14 Juin 1830*'. Médiathèque Équinoxe, Châteauroux.



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1840s, followed by impressionism. Under the aegis of Camille Corot (1796-1875) and Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867), another landscape tradition was based on an empirical perception of nature while still retaining the memory of the classical painting of the 18th century. Borget immersed himself in this artistic flow.

It was at this time that he developed his budding talent under the direction of a seascape painter, Baron Jean Antoine Gudin (1802-1880), for whom he held total admiration. However, his vocation for the direct observation of nature, his search for beauty, would frequently lead the young artist away from Paris. From 1830 to 1836, his travels in France greatly refined his vision. From 1830 onwards his horizon broadened following a journey in Normandy, a new land for French and English artists, such as Bonington (1801-1828). The purity of the lines of *Port-en-Bessin* (Plate 1) reveals a skilful mastery of space, a boldness and sobriety of style, portent of his talent as a landscape artist.

Following his travels in Switzerland in 1833, where he searched for little known places, he decided not to remain confined to an atelier.⁷ From then on, his ambition spurred him on to become his own teacher, and he was to create only directly from nature. Work became the driving force for Borget who relentlessly undertook many trips to study, paint and draw.

In July 1834, in the company of Eugène Flandin (1809-1876), a French artist, explorer and man of letters, Borget travelled to Italy,⁸ a centre of attraction for 19th century artists as it had been for centuries before. Of this meticulously prepared journey, he was to write: 'the journey to Italy is necessary for me, indispensable and I am going there to replace months of missed studio work rather than to visit this country that everyone visits.'⁹ This reflection is a good description of his approach: Borget expected to obtain a suitable environment in Italy in which to mature his art. The artist was entranced with the fascinating alternation of palaces and canals of Venice. He was to find this same delight some years later, when he travelled on the canals of the surrounding districts of Canton. He considered his studies of landscapes brought back from Italy as notes marking his source of inspiration or as personal teaching tools. The attentive observation of a country where the light was bright and clear thus facilitated the painter's later work. He wrote, therefore: 'My tastes, my feelings are clearer. The places where my life was smoother, where I found the atmosphere and the light

in closer harmony with my heart, ... beside the lakes, this is my nature, this is my painting's heartland'.¹⁰

Besides Italy, artists dreamed of other, more distant countries. Leaving from Havre, on 25 October 1836, Borget set out on a voyage of four years around the world, a journey which was to take him to America, China, the Philippines and India. In contrast to his contemporaries who participated in scientific missions, or who embarked for officially assigned work as seascape painters, Borget decided upon and organised the voyage himself, benefiting from the company of a friend, as courageous and enthusiastic as he was himself.¹¹

From Borget's 'Chinese' period, we have numerous works and beautiful letters sent to a friend (we have never managed to discover who this person was).¹²

For almost a year, from August 1838 to July 1839, the artist covered the narrow triangle formed by Canton, Macao and Hong Kong.

I will try to show here, through the sketches and paintings of the artist held by different collections in France and abroad, his talent as an observer of nature and man, his sources of inspiration, the quality and sincerity of his testimony to Chinese reality, and finally, his varied research style during his journey along the southern coast of China.

ARRIVAL AT HONG KONG

Borget left Peru on a North American ship, the *Henry Clay*, and arrived in China on 1 August 1838. Before transferring from the *Henry Clay* to the *Psyché*, since only a small boat could enter the port of Canton, the artist expressed his emotions in a flight of lyricism: 'Oh my friends, I will see you again ... I feel it, whatever the country that I travel through, under whatever sky my star brings me, however long my absence, no danger can await me since this terrible tempest has not engulfed us. Yes, I will return to see France; I will once again see with you the great fields ready for harvesting; I will once again walk those paths in the grape-picking season, where in my childhood I gathered wild plums, blackberries and hawthorn berries. My life has been strengthened, my heart renewed, and, should I die, I shall offer God a more fervent heart, a soul replenished with energy and faith'.¹³ Are these the premises of Borget's later religious conversion, which took place in his maturity?¹⁴

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Plate 2. *Nan Ao*, pencil, pen and brown ink. Private collection.

These nostalgic thoughts of his dear friends left behind, and the sweet memory of his native Berry, did not prevent his great joy at finally having reached China: 'China lies before me, China calls me; tomorrow I will have left the impression of my footsteps on the shores of this celestial Empire.'¹⁵

From 5 to 22 August, Borget travelled on the schooner *Psyché* where the stops were frequent along the southern coast of China in the direction of Hong Kong. The actual subjects of the *Coast of China near Mirs Bay* (private collection) and the *Crossing near Hong Kong* (private collection) are the waves, the rocky coast and the light, that is, three of the four elements—water, earth and air—expressed in black, grey and white. Borget's judicious treatment of deepening space goes beyond his seascapes and he developed it further

in the landscape of *Nan Ao* (Plate 2) and in the *Bay of Hong Kong* (Plate 3). In these two drawings, depth is evoked by the way the thick lines of the foreground give way progressively to the increasingly fine lines of the middle ground and background. The artist manages the gradation through different browns and greys obtained either by hatching in pen, or by soft pencil and stump. The landscape of the Island of Nan Ao is the first example of the composition of a motif centred so as to put it in relief. The pen strokes are more accentuated, more nervous and vigorous than the pencil lines.

The growing interest that the artist brought to seascapes was important in the evolution of this genre that Borget perfected all his life. As noted by Diederik Bakhuys, the precise views of the shore—which appeared in 18th century French art—were produced above all by artists during travels abroad.¹⁶ And likewise, the coastal *veduta* became one of Borget's specialities after his arrival in China. Following the example of their Western contemporaries, the Chinese seascape artists also attempted this, applying a manner of painting—a fairly low line of the horizon and importance given to the sky—in the style of the 17th century Dutch painters, familiar through prints imported in this form to China.¹⁷ Sunqua, active in Canton, Macao and Hong Kong between 1830 and 1870, is one of the best representatives of this school.¹⁸

From Hong Kong, where he arrived on 21 August, Borget made various excursions to the neighbouring villages.¹⁹ Hong Kong was, at the time of the painter's arrival in 1838, an almost virgin land for artists.²⁰ In this regard, thanks to his own accounts,

Plate 3. *Bay of Hong Kong*, pencil and stump, inscribed and dated lower left: 'Baie de Hong Kong 26 aout 1838'. Private collection.



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Plate 4. *Village between the Bay and Kowloon*, pencil, inscribed and dated lower left: 'Village entre la baie de Hong Kong et du Cowloon, 25 aout 1838'. Private collection.

dated, Borget may be considered a pioneer. So, in the *Village near Hong Kong* (private collection) and in the *Village between the Bay and Kowloon* (Plate 4), we have neither a panoramic view, nor a highlighting of details. What we find is the horizon less emphasised than the land in the foreground and middle ground. Importance is given to the land, the irregularities of the ground and the distribution of the vegetation.

In drawing the *Landscape of Hong Kong* (see note 2), Borget enhances his manner of working on the motif by alternating sketched areas and finished areas. The tree trunks are sketched in geometric lines, while the foliage in pale grey is drawn in great detail with contours and shadows. Another drawing, *The Tomb* (private collection) reveals the same search for a style combining both outline sketches and precise details.

CANTON

From the 17th century, Canton was the only port in China officially open to foreign trade. Women were still prohibited from staying there, and business was authorised only from August to December. During the dead season, from the beginning of spring until July, by order of the Emperor, the Europeans left Canton to

stay at Macao where they would rejoin their families. Discovering, on 20 September 1838, the famous factory quarter, the foreign trading companies with their offices and shops, Borget describes, with some irony: 'this little corner of earth which the sublime graciousness of the Emperor has conceded to the barbarians'.²¹ Certain views of the factories created by Chinese artists for their Western customers, produced in engravings, served both topographical and aesthetic purposes. If in the views of Macao's Praya Grande the Chinese artists had adopted the procedures of European composition (Bay of Naples), this was not the case for their views of the factories of Canton, where, as a rule, the Chinese painters had not absorbed Western pictorial conventions. To represent these views a wide variety of material was used: silver, lacquer work, porcelain, but above all paper and canvas were preferred. It is highly likely that Borget was able to see the prints and that they were an inspiration in his work. He thus found himself in the wake of an ancient tradition, in which the artists always portray the same points of view. As Peter Galassi commented, indeed, '... repetition was a fundamental aspect of the *veduta* discipline'.²²

Another Cantonese spot well-known to all, the *Factories Reclamation* was treated both in his

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Plate 5. *Residence of the President of the British East India Company*, pencil, inscribed and dated lower left, but only the date is legible: '3 7 bre 1838'. Private collection.

drawing (of 16 October 1838) and writing 'This is just a piece of land, reclaimed on the right bank of the river, which measures two hundred metres all round. Here, before the factory of each nation, fly the French, English, American and Dutch flags attached to tall flagpoles; this site is the only place where Europeans are permitted to take a walk ...' (20 September 1838).²³

But the artist's preference lay in places less well-known. Hence, a month earlier he had drawn a small *Chinese Customs Office* (private collection) near the British *hong*,²⁴ recognisable by its fire escape. And during this same period, he evoked the *Wharf of Canton* (Archives Départementales de l'Indre, Châteauroux), near the factories site at Canton.

MACAO AND A TASTE FOR NATURE

Two drawings found recently have modified the chronology of Borget's visit to China. They prove that Macao became known to Borget not on 24 October, as had always been believed, but nearly two months earlier. The first of these drawings, *The Path* (private collection), is dated 5 September 1838, while the second, representing the *Residence of the President of the British East India Company* (Plate 5),²⁵ is dated even earlier, 3 September of the same year.

At Macao, for Borget, each instant, each regard was an opportunity for a sketch. In the same day Borget was just as likely to linger over the representation of a forest path, as he was to briefly sketch a scene in the *Street in Macao* (Musée du Berry, Bourges). Moreover, it appears that *The Path* (private collection) was drawn on site, and then touched up in the evening.

In drawing the *Passage from Macao to Canton* (Plate 6) upon his return to Canton on 13 September 1838, Borget rekindled the Dutch tradition of the pathway along the water. This drawing may also be compared with the rivers and ponds composed by Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), nine years younger than Borget, with whom he seems to have shared a love for peaceful nature. However, in contrast to the realism of Daubigny, with his fast, elliptical portrayal of trees and ground, Borget sketches an observation of nature, in most cases well finished—a characteristic of his style that held firm throughout his entire life. The subtlety of the composition and

Plate 6. *Passage from Macao to Canton*, pencil, inscribed and dated lower right: 'de Macau à Canton, 13 7 bre'. Private collection.



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the direction of the light indicated by the shadows in the right foreground herald impressionism. Space is suggested by a vanishing point of the shore. This is a dissymmetric landscape where the earth dominates the aquatic component. Stylistically, its format and balance of composition are reminiscent of the elongated view of the *Shore* (private collection). Borget and Daubigny experienced the same bold emotion; frank and free expression. Their sensitivity and their draughtsmanship are very similar. Moreover, in the portfolios of our traveller we have found an etching by Daubigny, *View taken at Bas-Meudon*,²⁶ an indication of the affinities confirmed by Borget's pencil studies, as meticulously careful as the etchings.

Like the romantic landscape artists, Borget is a 'remarkable architect of trees', to recall an expression of Henri Focillon on the subject of other artists.²⁷ Following the example of Camille Corot and, even more, of Théodore Rousseau who painted oaks in the forest of Fontainebleau, he infused his works with a contemplative dimension, released by the majestic expanse of the branches. Thus, *Canal of Canton* (Plate 7), flanked by slender and gnarled pines, is perhaps a pretext to recreate, in the shade, the poetic atmosphere of the open air pursuits which appeared at the end of the 17th century. These *fêtes-galants* to which Antoine Watteau (1648-1721), their uncontested master, lent a melancholic depth, appear in all likelihood to have been one of Borget's sources of inspiration.

As much as the architectural elements (the

altar, the temple, the tomb), the trees allow the structuring of space, just as their form has been chosen and adapted in relation to the composition. In the *Immense Tree* (private collection), the reassuring and protective shade appears to dispense life, both on the shore with the temple and on the water. *Portrait of a Tree in all its Majesty* (private collection) is undeniably one of the most successful transcriptions of the artist, in which all the parts of the tree are treated in meticulous detail. In *The Funeral* (Plate 8),²⁸ Borget has another approach: he portrays the gulf of space between nature and culture, between the tree and the ritual performed before the tomb. His amazement before the trees is such

Plate 7. *Canal of Canton*, pencil. Lowe Art Museum, Miami, inv. no. 58.233.000.



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that he says: 'I was bewitched by their charm and for nothing in the world would I have wanted to break the spell with a single word.... My God! The beautiful sky, the beautiful land!.... I would be so happy to spend my life in this silence, this mystery, under the shade of these gigantic trees.'²⁹

On 24 October, Borget came back to Macao, after spending three days on the Inner Canal. The layout of *Macao Landscape* (Plate 9) rests on a large oblique line separating the foreground from the distance. By cleverly framing the scene he succeeds in balancing symmetrically the rocky slopes and the borderland valley that was closed off by the wall known as the *Porta do Cerco*.³⁰ This use of space is reminiscent of the views composed by Francisque Millet II (1666-1723), such as the *Characters by a Fountain in a Landscape* (Millon et Associés sale, 18 June 1997), as well as those of Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) painted upon his first return from Italy in 1761, such as *The Drinking Trough* (private collection) and the *Rock* (private collection).³¹

In certain cases, Borget went beyond the general view. He explored the panorama, and chose an *Ancient Temple* (Plate 10), from which he also took a 'subject'. This temple, which was identified as Kuan Iam Kiu Miu (Guanyin Gumiao),³² was situated at Mong-Ha (Wangsha), one of the 'wretched villages', as the travellers called them, near the wall. The monument and the mass of trees surrounding it are perfectly centred in the middle of a rectangle, the vertical arrangement in harmony with the central part of the temple's architecture. The lighting is rendered by the delicate subtlety of the foliage and by the sunlight filtering through the branches. The light, the pale greys, the spontaneity of the draughtsmanship seem impressionist. We can compare it with the lithograph of the *Temple*, in the album of *China and the Chinese*, which has faithfully kept to the structure of the original drawing.³³

The bird's-eye view of Macao is one adopted by both Western painters and Chinese artists. There was an extraordinary fashion—from the

Plate 8. *The Funeral*, oil on canvas, Sotheby's sale, Hong Kong, 4 December 1978, pl. 73, p. 25. Currently in Hong Kong Museum of Art, inv. no. AH 78.12.



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end of the 18th century and up to around 1830—of these views as seen from Penha hill overhanging the peninsula, with the Inner Harbour to the left, and the Praya Grande to the right, up to Porta do Cerco and on to mainland China. This infatuation was above all seen in the work of Chinese artists working for foreign customers. The peninsula figured on copper, ivory, lacquer work or paper, although canvas remained the favourite material. After a significant drop in popularity, we find towards 1870³⁴—and even since 1860³⁵—a strong return to this panoramic composition which appears to coincide with the arrival of photography on albuminous paper in Macao. This was indeed a simple means of reproduction for Chinese painters, whether involving architectural or portrait details.³⁶ The works of photographers such as Felice Beato, John Thomson or Milton Miller were perceived at that time as being documentaries.



Plate 9. *Macao Landscape*, pencil, inscribed and dated lower right: 'Macao 24 8 bre 1838'. Private collection.

Borget was avid for subjects who might, through their uniqueness, enrich his portfolios of drawings. This

Plate 10. *Ancient Temple*, pencil and red highlights, signed and inscribed lower left: 'A Macao Aug. Borget'. Former collection Paul Prouté, no. 66, autumn 1977, no. 51, p. 4. Currently in Hong Kong Museum of Art, inv. no. AH 80.6.



ARCHITECTURES AND CHARACTERS

In drawing the monuments of Macao such as *The Church of São Agostinho*³⁷ Borget followed the taste of architectural representation developed in France from 1820 by the famous publication *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* by Taylor and Nodier, a style already expressed by the English watercolorists. Indeed, the lithograph *The Chapel of Riom* by Mathieu, from H. Durand, taken from the volume on *L'Ancienne Auvergne et le Velay*, and present in Borget's portfolios is greatly indicative of the multiple sources of his visual culture.³⁸

Like Balzac, studying the private life of Parisians (for example in *Facino Cane*),³⁹ Borget observed the groups of Chinese in the streets of Macao. Our artist proved to be more assiduous than a detective. He reported: 'So I followed them, going up and down as they did, but at a distance'.⁴⁰ However, as a European he felt frustrated because, not knowing the language, he could not communicate.

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Plate 11. *Passage between Macao and Canton*, oil on canvas, signed and dated lower right: 'Aug. Borget. 1845'. Private collection.

is the case of the dwellings of the poor; he was the first to introduce them into the graphic evocation of Macao. Even the illustrious art critique Etienne-Jean Delécluse was inspired by this subject:

‘All the people of ordinary trades live in stationary boats, and for the most part they present a spectacle of great misery. For example, along the coast, hamlets are created where the base of the houses is an old boat on which a second is hoisted to make two floors, and in these worm-eaten rat-holes live large, poor families whose faces, in spite of this, always show the gaiety of the carefree, wealth of the poor.’⁴¹

In his profoundly personal regard, in the quality and sincerity of his observation of nature and man,

Borget reminds us of Adrien Dauzats (1804-1868)—one of the very first painters to travel to the Orient, in 1830. Thanks to the reliability of their evidence, both have contributed to our knowledge and to our vision of the countries they visited.

During his visit to Macao, the artist could not have avoided coming across the representatives of major houses. Once again, he was concerned to find a balance and thus tried to set up a strong link between the imposing architecture of the *Residence of the President of the British East India Company* (Plate 5) and the natural elements. The artist uses the tree in the foreground as a pretext to lead the eye to the large building in the distance. To the left is the silhouette of the church of São

Plate 12. *Boats*, watercolour, signed in ink lower right: 'Aug. Borget'. Private collection.



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Lourenço. The tree and the house enhance each other, the residence is thus better perceived in this setting.

WATER, REFLECTIONS AND BOATS

Many very different works show Borget's talent in using reflection on water as a descriptive resource. Travelling on the inner canal (see *Passage between Macao and Canton*, Plate 11), he subtly adapts the traditional theme of the Chinese worshipping at the tombs of their ancestors to the western type of humanist landscape. The artist transposes the vision of a park in autumn colours and he arranges around the edges of the smooth surface of a pond the masses of great trees with their reflections. The spectator is invited to penetrate the space of the painting and the water leads him straight into the interior of the landscape. His glance shifts towards the left, attracted by the source of light and by the vanishing point which dissolves into the group of clouds. The motif suggests the atmosphere of a calm and nostalgic dream. Once again, we find in the *Pagoda* (private collection), the water which leads the eye towards the centre of the composition where the pagoda and the cluster of trees are massed. The reflection of this mass forms a vertical axis, compensating for stretching the composition over a long rectangle. A similar division of the light shows a resemblance to the canvas of *Passage between Macao and Canton* to the watercolour *Boats* (Plate 12). In these two works the most luminous and lightest area is found to the left, while to the right the twilight approaches. In the watercolour in particular, the mastery of the reflection persists, discrete and elusive, as in the best impressionist sketches.

The artist was always on the lookout for a new or fascinating genre, in the hope of developing a typical motif and drawing from it recurrent themes. Indeed, Borget enjoyed reworking and developing

the representation of certain places and certain men, loyal to the richness of his original emotion. This was also true of the fishermen's houseboats on the banks of the water, the variants of which he multiplied. This approach, characteristic of Borget, explains the similarity between most of his creations, both during his Chinese period and later. Among the boat cycle drawings, we can distinguish in particular those he drew on the shores of two small islands, situated facing Macao, *At Lapa near Macao* and *At Typa near Macao* (Lowe Art Museum, Miami). In these drawings he shows the aesthetics of a round, huddled form in the centre of the composition, in order to better isolate the motif of the boat in the middle of the natural space. We are aware of at least a dozen drawings which follow



Plate 13. *Boats and Fishermen's Dwellings near Canton*, pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, white gouache highlights on gray-blue paper, signed and inscribed: 'Bateaux et habitations de pêcheurs près de Canton (d'après nature), Aug. Borget', stamped V. Déséglise (Lugt 356 c) lower left. Archives Départementales de l'Indre, Chateauroux, inv. no. 48 J 1 B 58.

the lines of this subject and its layout. One of these, *Boats and Fishermen's Dwellings near Canton* (Plate 13)⁴² offers perhaps the most complete synthesis. In this case, the draughtsman creates a balanced composition, harmoniously dividing the perspective of the area to the left and the study of the daily life of the fishermen. From the poetry of the light clouds and the river with its dark reflections, the artist concentrates our attention on a realistic monochrome engraving. Moreover, his focus lies closely on the characters; the fishermen and their boats are portrayed as one, as if Borget saw

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the human condition as inextricably bound to its habitation. The highlights in white gouache further accentuate the contrasts of values. In addition to the graphic interpretation of this typical theme of the coasts of southern China—already explored by Chinnery⁴³—Borget added that of a writer. While the artist might envy the fate of the men he finds, a fate that he perceives only from a poetic perspective, he never abandoned his lucidity as a foreign witness. He also wrote of these fishermen: ‘When I pass by these nomadic boats ..., I really understand the charm they find in this very limited existence ... Yet I realise that they are in fact poor pariahs whom public opinion condemns ... But I could not pity them ... when they are weary of being there, they will look for other shelters’.⁴⁴

SKETCHES AND STUDIES OF BEHAVIOUR

In certain portfolios of the artist, the groups of Chinese figures are not so much scenes of everyday life but rather small format studies executed for the purpose of establishing a collection of characters to whom Borget could refer when preparing his drawings. Thus, the dice players in *Chinese Gamblers* (Plate 14) provide him with the motif he was to use frequently, such as in the *Inner Harbour of Macao* (Plate 15). In this sketch, he has distributed the characters in a shrewd manner in order to give life to his representation of the place. It is possible that he did not place them all there at the same time, because the seated fisherman is drawn in an ink of a different colour and lacks the underlying line in pencil.⁴⁵ On this page, the wavy line is broken in places and then quickly resumes its course with certainty, giving full expression to the drawing. It is curious to see to what extent the sketches of the English painter George Chinnery (1774-1852) are

close to those of Borget. The two artists met briefly and are similar to one another with the same practice of making sketches on the spot. But, in contrast to Chinnery who lived in Macao for 27 years, Borget was merely a traveller, yet with this ability to capture images and impressions restore them with greater strength than a permanent resident. Chinnery’s particular fascination for the theme of fishermen’s dwellings was not perhaps alien to Borget’s artistic progression, and likewise the personal approach to the same subject by the latter might have contributed to changing Chinnery’s manner. Nevertheless, the acquaintance between Borget and Chinnery was not as close as that which existed between Borget and the German painter Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858), with whom he spent more time in Chile.⁴⁶

Nurtured by examples from the 18th century, Borget’s characters were drawn with great sensitivity. That attitude is portrayed most closely in a beautiful and accomplished drawing held by the Thierry Bodin collection (*A Chinese Sitting on a Stone Wall*). This type of character shown from behind endures in the iconographic inheritance left by Boucher’s peasants and Joseph Vernet’s fisherman.⁴⁷ Influenced by such models, Borget expanded his style. It is in this way he pencilled *The Mariner*, a direct descendant of a drawing by Watteau.⁴⁸

The customs of the inhabitants of Macao fascinated the artist. He expressed this in the *Puppet Theatre* (collection of the Musée du Berry, Bourges), an elaborately descriptive drawing with good integration of the characters in the street, portrayed in the diversity of their attitudes. There is other evidence of Borget’s interest for the puppet theatre: we can cite at least three variations of this motif, whether in rough sketch or as a finished study, revealing his taste for successive versions, which are always increasingly better mastered.⁴⁹ Another drawing, *The Inner Harbour of Macao* (Plate 15), one of his best, also demonstrates his curiosity about Chinese customs. He situates the characters on the banks, in the foreground of the composition, by placing two dice players seated in the centre of the group. The onlookers have a different posture, standing or bent over, attentive to the gaming pair. Borget thus contributes to the documenting of local daily life. The two spectators portrayed in profile, to the left and to the right, and a third further away, facing us and overlooking the scene, surround the main action; they

Plate 14. *Chinese Gamblers*, pen and brown and gray ink over pencil. Private collection.



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Plate 15. *The Inner Harbour of Macao*, pencil, signed and inscribed lower right: 'Port Intérieur à Macao (Chine) Aug. Borget'. Sotheby's sale Hong Kong, 4 December 1978, pl. 6, p. 6.

bear witness to the acuity of the artist's scrutiny, they even reinforce it. This skilful composition is further enhanced by two complementary factors: the vigorous pencil hatching tends to amplify the visual effects of the figures and decor, while the concentric arrangement of the men brings our attention to the middle of the drawing.

FROM PERSONAL DRAWING TO EXHIBITED WORKS

The artist achieved a modulation of light and distance with a single technique, that of pen and ink. In the *Fresh Water Spring* (Lowe Art Museum, Miami) behind Guia Fort, Borget uses variations of pen lines in the style of an engraver. Likewise, on the slopes of *Landscape at Penha* (Plate 16), he combines more or less dense hatchings with more or less thicker lines. Emphasis given to the right places also confers great depth to the distribution of space. The parts filled with sunlight, such as the mountain, are simply drawn in a linear way. Borget knew how to develop his drawing

for the sake of the drawing, as an autonomous art, but that never prevented him from using his portfolios as a source of inspiration, to rekindle the fire of his memories and prepare the composition of a canvas; 'While I might not have a single house, nor a single interior, on the other hand, how many figures and picturesque scenes are buried in my portfolios only to be resuscitated in Europe.'⁵⁰

Besides projects devoted to the entire motif, Borget studied isolated figures that he then used in his definitive work.⁵¹ This is the case in *The Great Temple of Macao* (collection of the Musée du Berry, Bourges), a picture reminiscent of the engraving *Public Promenade* by Philibert-Louis Debucourt (1755-1832). The festive atmosphere reigning over the diverse and colourful crowd gathered together under the shade of the large trees is transposed by Borget to create the esplanade scene of the great temple of Macao during the *sing-song* (a theatrical representation). Borget even mixed with the crowd and identified himself as one of the spectators of this feast: 'Leaning on the balustrade, I watched this crowd which swarmed before me'.⁵²

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THE SUCCESS OF CHINESE EXOTICISM

Like Dauzats, a painter and traveller of the Mediterranean, most notably Spain, Borget was strongly imbued with the visual impressions of Southern China buried in his portfolios. The phrase that Paul Guinard dedicated to Adrien Dauzats when he spoke of the 'capital of memories on which he will live to his last day on earth'⁵³ could well apply to Borget.

On his return to Paris in 1840, the artist regularly exhibited his work at the Salon until 1859⁵⁴ and took his place as an 'orientalist' painter of China. His sketches were presented together and published in albums of lithographs,⁵⁵ where his major work *China and the Chinese* held the firm interest of Etienne-Jean Delécluze who acknowledged its worth:

I repeat, the work created by M. A. Borget offers nothing but the appearance of the Chinese and China, in Macao and in Canton; but this silhouette, if I may use this expression, carries

the stamp of authenticity; and it is a great deal just to see the faithful representations of the general and ordinary appearance of a country and its inhabitants. This work acquaints the foreigner with the habits, traditions and customs, and prepares the readers and if necessary, the travellers by drawing their attention to things both intimate and profound,

If, as I have no doubt it will, the works created by M.A. Borget receive the acclaim they deserve, he will provide us with a sequel, so as to justify the title he has given it: '*China and the Chinese*'. And we will be grateful to him for having extended our knowledge of this country by means of an entirely peaceful conquest.

He further states,

As to the lithographic drawings which are an essential part of this book, they are handled with remarkable talent. And M.M.E. Cicéri has produced an excellent interpretation of the

Plate 16. *Landscape at Penha*, pencil, pen and brown ink. Macao Museum.



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beautiful original drawings that M. Borget had the kindness to show me on his return to Europe.⁵⁶

Balzac's death in Paris in August 1850, closed a chapter in the life of the painter. The artist decided to move to Bourges, the administrative centre of his native Berry. Borget earned his livelihood from the drawing lessons he gave at several institutions in Bourges. He devoted the last twenty years of his life as member of the Saint-Vincent de Paul Society to relieve the misery of the poor. But, despite all, the artist did not stop painting. Drawings and painting dated from this period confirm that Borget never gave up his art. He also expressed himself through writing. This unknown aspect of his talent and his personality did not escape

a critic of the time, who spoke of him as a guide and friend: 'The letters, so truthful and at the same time so spiritual written by M. Borget A text as only M. Borget knows how to write, in a pure and colourful style, accompanied by admirable plates of exquisite finesse; so we continue, untiring, with a spiritual travelling companion, from the *banks of the Hudson* to the *Philippines*, passing through the *Sandwich Islands*, crossing *Canton*, on a market day, travelling along *Clives Road*, in Calcutta, and finally coming to sit in the shade next to the fountains in Arequipa (Peru)'.⁵⁷ **RC**

Translated by PHILOS - Comunicação Global, Lda.

NOTES

- 1 The three exhibitions were held in Hospice Saint-Roch museum, in Issoudun: *Auguste Borget peintre-voyageur autour du monde. Dessins & peintures* (with a catalogue under the same title), 1999; *Auguste Borget sur les rives du Gange* (no publications accompanied this event), 2007; *Carnets de voyage Auguste Borget, Notes et dessins* (with a catalogue under the same title), 2008.
- 2 Private collection, cf. Barbara Giordana (Staniszewska), 'Auguste Borget, la vision d'un peintre en Chine du Sud', Bourges, *Cahiers d'archéologie & d'histoire du Berry*, no. 171, September 2007, pp. 30-38, pl. 2.
- 3 We have the good fortune to have the diary of Auguste Borget, written during his journey, and published under the title 'À bord de l'Henry Clay', in *L'Art en Province* (Moulins: P. A. Desrosiers), in two editions: 11th vol. 1st ed., 1850; 12th vol. 6th ed., 1851.
- 4 In *L'Artiste*, Paris, May-June 1845, t. IV, p. 35.
- 5 Cf. 'Conversion de M. Borget', dated 20 December 1863, in *Semaine Religieuse du Berry*, Bourges, publisher Tripault, 1877, 13th vol. 13th year, pp. 20-22 and pp. 29-32.
- 6 Jacques Thuillier, *Delacroix et le romantisme français*. Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art, 1989, p. 17.
- 7 Letter from Borget to H. de Balzac of 31 August 1833, in Honoré de Balzac, *Correspondance*. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1966, t. II, letter 668, p. 352.
- 8 Cf. Théodore Gudin, signed handwritten letter, Le Havre 11 August 1834, to the sculptor Thorwaldsen in Rome, Thierry Bodin, 'Balzac et le Berry', in *Le Courrier Balzacien*, Paris, Maison de Balzac, no. 10, October 1980 (special expo. edition), no. 54, p. 26.
- 9 Letter from Borget to H. de Balzac of February 1834, in Honoré de Balzac, *Correspondance*, letter 750, p. 461.
- 10 Letter from Borget to H. de Balzac of beginning of July 1835, *ibid.*, letter 935, p. 695.
- 11 He seized a commercial opportunity—by becoming associated with the young son of a ship owner of Havre, a certain Guillon, whom he later left in Chile, probably towards the end of 1837—to depart very rapidly. Cf. David James, 'Un ami de Balzac, l'artiste voyageur: Auguste Borget' (French version), *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, July-August 1955, p. 69; Honoré de Balzac, *Correspondance inédite avec Madame Zulma Carraud* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1935), p. 308.
- 12 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois, 32 dessins exécutés d'après nature par Auguste Borget, et lithographiés à deux teintes par Eugène Ciceri* (Paris: Goupil et Vibert, 1842; in 1842 this album was also published in English with the title: *Sketches of China and the Chinese* (London: Tilt & Bogue).
- 13 Cf. Auguste Borget, 'À bord de l'Henry Clay', in *L'Art en Province*, 12th vol. 6th ed., 1851, p. 21.
- 14 Cf. 'Conversion de M. Borget'.
- 15 Cf. Auguste Borget, 'À bord de l'Henry Clay', in *L'Art en Province*, 11th vol. 1st ed., 1850, p. 167.
- 16 In particular: Pierre-Jacques Volaire (1729 – around 1802) and Alexandre-Jean Noël (1752-1834); cf. Diederik Bakhuys, 'De Puget aux frères Ozanne: l'art de la marine et le dessin en France', in *Autour de Claude-Joseph Vernet, la marine à voile de 1650 à 1890* (Rouen: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1999), p. 58, and the references quoted. For Volaire, cf. also Serge Lemoine and Lionel Bergatto, *Paysages, dessins français XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles dans les collection du Musée de Grenoble* (Grenoble: Musée de Grenoble, 1997), pl. 71.
- 17 Dutch boats had been taking Western engravings to Canton since the 17th century. The collection of Dr. G.E. Morrison (1862-1920), constituted in Beijing in the early 1900's, includes for example, plates by Wenceslaus Hollar (1606-1677) engraved based on views drawn by Johann Nieuhoff (1618-1672) who accompanied the Dutch mission in China (1655-1657). For Hollar, in particular, I would like to thank William Shang for having provided the information and the catalogue of Henmi Yukiko, *Tōyō Bunko shōzō seiyō hangarui mokuroku-Fūkeiga no bu* (Catalogue of western engravings belonging to Tōyō Bunko – section on landscape), *Tōyō bunko shōhō*, no. 31, March 2000, pl. 55-101.
- 18 Cf. Carl L. Crossman, *The Decorative Arts of The China Trade, Paintings, Furnishings and Exotic Curiosities* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1991), p. 106-155. This work was published for the first time under the title *The China Trade, Export Paintings, Furniture, Silver and Other Objects* in 1972, by The Pyne Press, Princeton, USA. The 1991 edition was enriched in terms of text and illustrations.
- 19 He drew *Village near Hong Kong* and *Village between the bay and Kowloon*, both in pencil, private collection.

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- 20 A watercolour, *Cascade of Aberdeen*, dated around 1816, is attributed to William Havell (1782-1857), Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong.
- 21 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 19.
- 22 Peter Galassi, *Corot en Italie. La peinture de plein air et la tradition classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991; original edition: Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1991), p. 85. We add the production of the above, in glass, showing the factories of Canton, made in China for export around 1800.
- 23 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 19 (letter dated 20 September 1838).
- 24 This *hong* is also portrayed in watercolour by the tea tester and amateur painter Warner Varnham; cf. Joseph Ting, *George Chinnery, His Pupils and Influence* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1985), pl. 58; Patrick Connor, *The China Trade 1600-1860* (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1986), pl. 33.
- 25 One of the most imposing houses of Macao, cf. Joseph S.P. Ting and Vivian W.Y. Hung, *Gateways to China. Trading Ports of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1987), p. 64-65; Wang Wenda 王文达, *Aomen Zhangu 澳门掌故* (Historical Anecdotes on Macao). Macao: Aomen Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1999, p. 188-189.
- 26 Charles-François Daubigny, *Vue prise au Bas-Meudon*, aquatint and etching on steel based on a daguerreotype; 143 x 203 mm. 1843, cf. Michel Melot, *L'œuvre gravé de Boudin, Corot, Daubigny, Dupré, Jongkind, Millet, Théodore Rousseau* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1978), no. 86, plate in *Excursions Daguerriennes*, no. 17, 2nd vol., 1843.
- 27 Henri Focillon, *La peinture au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 1st vol, p. 340, reprint of the 1927 edition (Paris: Henri-Laurens), with the exception of the preface.
- 28 His preparatory pencil drawing is at the Musée du Berry, Bourges.
- 29 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 18 (letter dated 9 September 1838).
- 30 Porta do Cerco or Porta da Barreira, the wall built in 1573 by the Chinese, in order to isolate the Portuguese enclave from Mainland China.
- 31 The two works are reproduced in Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), pl. 129 and 131, p. 86.
- 32 Information kindly provided by Maria Fátima Lau and Mister Chan of Macao, who greatly facilitated my research, and for which I am extremely grateful. For the history of this temple, cf. Wang Wenda, *Aomen Zhangu*, p. 73-74.
- 33 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, pl. 15.
- 34 Cf. *Panoramic View of Macao from Penha Hill*, sketch in gouache, Hong Kong Museum of Art, in William Sargent, *Views of The Pearl River Delta, Macao, Canton and Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art and Peabody Essex Museum, 1997), pl. 27.
- 35 Cf. Patrick Connor, 'Images of Macao', *The Magazine Antiques*, vol. 155, no. 3, March 1999, pl. XI, p. 432-441; Andrew Hershberger, 'Felice Beato in Macao? Notes on a panoramic photograph at Princeton', in *Arts of Asia*, vol. 30, no. 2, March-April 2000, p. 103-111.
- 36 Portraits had already been painted, in 1844, by Chinese artists based on daguerreotypes, brought in or made on site, at the time of the commercial delegation of the French Mission to Macao—as reported by Natalis Rondot (1821-1900), one of its members, in his handwritten *Journal* (private collection).
- 37 Private collection, cf. Barbara Giordana, 'Auguste Borget, la vision d'un peintre en Chine du Sud', pl. 5.
- 38 Jean Adhémar, *La France romantique, Les lithographies de paysage au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Somogy, Éditions d'Art, 1997), no. 586, p. 127. First edition, Paris, Armand Colin, 1937. The 1997 edition has more illustrations.
- 39 Balzac, *Facino Cane* (Paris, March 1836), in *La Comédie humaine* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard), 1977, t. VI, p. 1019-1032.
- 40 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 14 (letter of 22 February 1839).
- 41 Etienne-Jean Delécluze, 'La Chine et les Chinois, par M. A. Borget', *Journal des Débats*, Paris, 31 December 1842.
- 42 Unpublished drawing which we found, with two others, in 1997 in the Joseph Thibault collection, Archives Départementales de l'Indre.
- 43 George Chinnery, *Images of Nineteenth Century Macao* (Macao: Comissão Territorial de Macao para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997). This catalogue was revised and enriched with illustrations compared with the Lisbon catalogue: *George Chinnery (1774-1852) Macao. Uma Viagem Sentimental* (Lisbon: Fundação das Descobertas/Fundação Oriente, 1995).
- 44 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 26 (letter of 3 October 1838).
- 45 The colour of the ink is difficult to see in this drawing and it could also be brown ink in two shades over the pencil lines.
- 46 Cf. David James, 'Un ami de Balzac, l'artiste voyageur: Auguste Borget', and by the same author, *En Las Pampas y Los Andes, Treinta y tres dibujos y textos sobre Argentina, Chile y Peru de Auguste Borget* (Buenos Aires: Pardo-Emece, 1960).
- 47 For example, François Boucher, *Peasant* (Christie's sale of 23 March 1982, pl. 120); Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), *Angler, by the sea*, Jean Ducros, *Trois millénaires d'art et de marine* (Paris: Petit Palais, 1965), pl. 42.
- 48 Watteau, *Nautonier vu du dos*, drawing publicised in the 18th century through the engraving by J. Audran in the compendium of *Figures de différents caractères*; cf. Pierre Rosenberg et Louis-Antoine Prat, *Antoine Watteau (1684-1721). Catalogue raisonné des dessins* (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1996), t. III, G. 56, pl. 141.
- 49 For example, *A Market Day in Macao*, pencil, pen and ink, and *At the Esplanade of the Great Temple of Macao*, pencil, pen and ink and wash, Lowe Art Museum, Miami, inv. No. 57.021.000 and 58.213.000. See also *At the Esplanade of the Great Temple of Macao*, pencil, pen and ink and wash, with white highlights, signed, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited.
- 50 Auguste Borget, 'À bord de l'Henry Clay', in *L'Art en Province*, 12th vol. 6th ed., 1851, p. 17.
- 51 For example, *The Blind Man*, watercolour on pencilled preparation, and *A Hog*, Indian ink wash, watercolour, cf. Barbara Giordana, 'Um Pintor Francês na China e em Macau', *Macao*, no. 88, August 1999, pl. 17, 18.
- 52 Auguste Borget, *La Chine et les Chinois*, p. 9 (letter of 2 May 1839).
- 53 Paul Guinard, 'Adrien Dauzats, Peintre et voyageur romantique', *Médecine de France*, no. 116, p. 20.
- 54 Ulric Richard Desaix (cf. Barbara Giordana, 'Auguste Borget, la vision d'un peintre en Chine du Sud', note 30) drew up the list in the form of handwritten notes on the works sent by Borget to the Paris Salon, as well as for the exhibitions in French provinces and Belgium, all of which were accompanied by his comments on the localisations of the works, cf. Fonds Richard, *Salons de Paris 1836-1859, Expositions de Belgique et de diverses villes de France*, Médiathèque Équinoxe, Châteauroux. His notes were partially published in *Comptes rendus des travaux de la Société du Berry à Paris*, 10th year, 1862-1863, pp. 300-301.
- 55 Ulric Richard Desaix also summarised Borget's activity in the publishing field, cf. Barbara Giordana, 'Auguste Borget, la vision d'un peintre en Chine du Sud', note 33; *Comptes rendus des travaux...*, p. 301.
- 56 Étienne-Jean Delécluze, 'La Chine et les Chinois, par M. A. Borget', dedicated an entire feuillet to Borget's outstanding work.
- 57 Eugène de Montlaur, account published in the journal *L'Art en Province*, 12th vol., 6th ed., 1851, p. 27, on the occasion of the publication of *Fragments d'un voyage autour du monde*, Borget's work which illustrates the many facets of its author.