How construction technologies, materials, and labour made Macanese architecture.



BUILDING

Architect: Carlo Spinola

Date: 1602-1640

Location: Calcada de São Paulo,

Macau

Owner:

Society of Jesus (Jesuits) [formerly] Gov't of Macau; Cultural Affairs

Bureau [currently]

Contractor:

Unknown [original unknown]
Skilled Japanese & Chinese artisans
[redesign/construction]

Cost: 30,000 taels of silver [originally]

Function:

College [original)

Historical landmark [currently] **Area:** Santo António parish,

Macau

Current state: Well maintained

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Ruins of St. Paul's in Macau stand as a powerful symbol of cultural fusion and historical resilience. Originally constructed in the early 17th century, the site was part of a grand Jesuit complex that included the Church of Mater Dei and St. Paul's College.

1573: Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano arrives in Macau. He later founds St. Paul's College, the first Western-style university in East Asia.

1602: Construction begins on the Church of Mater Dei, adjacent to the college. This grand Catholic church was part of a Jesuit complex that included the college and Mount Fortress.

1637–1640: The church's elaborate granite façade is built, showcasing Baroque architectural style with Asian influences.

1835: A fire destroys most of the church and college buildings, leaving only the stone façade and a few foundations. This event marks the transformation of the site into "The Ruins of St. Paul's".

1995: Restoration efforts are undertaken to preserve the façade and archaeological remains, led by the Macau Cultural Bureau.

KEZIA JANE ANN ALLEN - 202400305

RUINS OF ST. PAUL'S [RUÍNAS DE SÃO PAULO]





MATERIALS & SYSTEMS

- MATERIALS USED [THEN AND NOW]

<u>Granite</u>: The grand façade was built from granite blocks, chosen for durability and visual impact.

<u>Wood</u>: Interior structures and roofing were made of wood, which unfortunately contributed to the fire.

<u>Lime Mortar</u>: Used as a binding agent in masonry, typical of European construction at the time.

<u>Plaster and Stucco</u>: Decorative elements and interior finishes may have included lime-based plaster.

<u>Gold Leaf and Paint</u>: For religious iconography and embellishments, especially within the church.

- CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

<u>Baroque Architectural Style</u>: The façade reflects Italian Baroque influences, with Corinthian columns, intricate carvings, and layered symbolism.

<u>Jesuit Engineering</u>: The Jesuits brought European construction methods, including stone carving and vaulting techniques.

<u>Chinese Labor and Craftsmanship</u>: Local artisans and laborers contributed significantly, blending European design with Chinese building practices.

<u>Tiered Façade Design</u>: The five-level façade was built to resemble a retablo (a decorative altar screen), with niches for statues and symbolic carvings.

WORKERS & SKILLS

- TYPES

<u>Jesuit Missionaries and Architects</u>: A cross-cultural coordination of designers, supervisors, and symbolic planners with Baroque architecture skills and religious iconography. Notable figures are Carlo Spinola (architect), and Alessandro Valignano (founder and strategist)

<u>Chinese Craftsmen</u>: Skills and roles were stone carving, masonry, woodwork, and decorative detailing

Japanese Christian Artisans: Responsibilities were lacquer and metalwork, carpentry, and religious art, lacquer and metal techniques. Many were refugees from Japan's anti-Christian persecutions.

<u>Laborers and Porters</u>: Provided construction support by transporting granite blocks, mixing mortar, and site preparations. They were likely local recruits from surrounding villages, or Jesuit-supported communities.

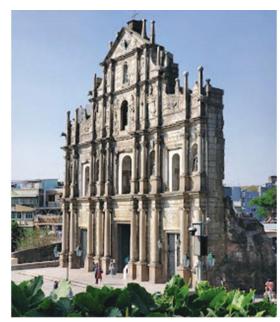
- FORMING

<u>Jesuit-Led Coordination</u>: Jesuits acted as project managers, combining European architectural vision with local execution. They recruited skilled workers through missionary networks and local Christian converts.

<u>Cultural Integration</u>: Teams were often multilingual and multi-ethnic. Jesuits trained local artisans in European techniques while adapting to local materials and styles.

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RUINS OF ST. PAUL'S [RUÍNAS DE SÃO PAULO]



































