Feast of Saint John

On 24th June 1622, the Dutch army tried to conquer Macao but they were repelled by a small bunch of local inhabitants. This victory can be considered miraculous given the disparity between the number of people mobilized to defend the city and the amount of the invading forces.

In the 17th century, Macao was a strategic point for the Portuguese maritime trade in Asia. Since 1601, the Dutch, who was eager to control this lucrative trade, had performed several attempts to take over Macao, but not successful.

At the dawn of 24th June 1622, a fleet of 13 Dutch warships laid siege to Macao. Two of the Dutch warships bombarded the Fortress of St. Francis' bulwark as a tactic of diversion while, at the same time, approximately 800 troops disembarked at Cacilhas Beach that was under the protection of a small group of Portuguese and local residents lead by António Rodriguez Cavalinho. The Captain of the Dutch fleet, C. Reijersen, got injured soon after the attack has commenced, but it did not stop the Dutch troops from advancing.

At the entry gates located at the foot of Guia Hill, the Jesuit Father Jerónimo Rho fired a cannonball from Mount Fortress, which were simple barracks back then, and precisely hit and exploded the Dutch powder kegs. This resulted in confusion and made possible a counter-attack led by Lopo Sarmento de Carvalho, Captain of the trading ship that travelled between Macao and Japan. The Dutch retreated and a lot of them were killed or drowned in the beach.

This miraculous victory took place on the Day of Saint John the Baptist who was made the patron saint of the city by municipal and popular vote. Since then, the Senate (City Council) committed to organizing a procession and a novena each year in addition to other popular festivals, in honor of this historical event. The 24th of June became the Macao City Day and it was a public holiday until Macao returned to its motherland in 1999.

When Macao has become Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, several local associations have been organizing the "Feast of Saint John" at Calçada da Igreja de São Lázaro since 2007. The feast, which has been recorded in the inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Macao, intends to remind people of this important historical event. Celebration activities include setting up of stalls with food and drinks, traditional handicrafts, books and so on, as well as a wide variety of entertainment programs with music and performances that attract plenty of residents and tourists.

2022 marks the 400th anniversary of Macao's victory over an invasion attempt and it is recalled in this commemorative set of stamps "Feast of Saint John" issued by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau with the support of the International Institute of Macau.

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