



Research Article

THE PARCEL AND STRATFOR ISLANDS UNDER THE SOVEREIGNTY OF VIETNAM THROUGH PUBLICATIONS IN PORTUGAL AND SWITZERLAND FROM 1841 TO 1847

*Dr. Nguyen Thanh Minh

Expert in East Sea Studies, Hanoi City, Vietnam

Received 20th February 2025; Accepted 27th March 2025; Published online 30th April 2025

Abstract

During the reign of King Thieu Tri, in addition to publications mentioning the Parcel Islands in Dai Nam published in the United States, Hungary, Spain and Italy that we have mentioned in previous issues, there were also many publications containing this content appearing in England, India, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Scotland or Switzerland. In the article continuing the above-mentioned contemporary theme in this issue, although the publications in Portugal and Switzerland are not numerous, they are international evidences showing the process of changing the names of entities and their owners from “Parcel”/reefs in the sea, belonging to the geographical territory of “Cochinchina”/meaning Dai Viet or An Nam in the 15th century, to the “Paracels”/Hoang Sa archipelago - at that time including Truong Sa, under the sovereignty of “Impero di An-nam”/Empire of An Nam/Vietnam/Dai Nam in the first half of the 19th century.

Keywords: Hoang Sa, Truong Sa, sovereignty, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

1. The recognition of the Parcel/Paracels archipelago as part of the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dai Viet or An Nam in the 15th century in the Portuguese edition of the maritime and colonial almanac in the period 1841-1847

In a monthly publication in Portuguese published under the direction of the Associação Marítima e Colonial [Portuguese Maritime and Colonial Association] entitled: *Annaes marítimos e colonias* [Maritime and Colonial Almanac], in No. 11 of September 1841 in the city of Lisboa [also written as Lisbon], Portugal, there was an article *Reflexões geraes acerca do Infante D. Henrique e dos descobrimentos de que ellefoiautor no século XV* [General information about Prince D. Henrique and his discoveries in the 15th century], from pages 495 - 527, including the paragraph mentioning the archipelago Parcel/Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa islands are associated with the geographical territory of Cochinchina/at that time, it still meant Dai Viet or An Nam [from the 17th century, the noun Cochinchina meant Dang Trong]. Prince D. Henrique was the son of King D. João I, an important figure in Portuguese politics in the 15th century and the Age of Geographical Discovery. As a rich and powerful man, Prince D. Henrique sponsored expeditions to explore many places in the world, through the East Indies, and especially the West African coast, and at the same time expanded the network of trade in goods and slaves with these regions. However, it was not until the end of the 18th century that he was honored by the international community as a Navigator. In the September 1841 issue mentioned above, the article for this subject begins with the introduction of the source of the discoveries of Prince D. Henrique in the 15th century used by the Editorial Committee, specifically as follows:

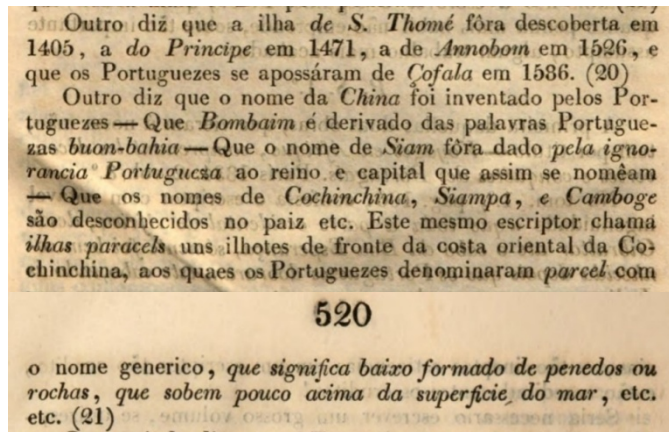
“Our member, the Most Reverend Patriarch of Lisboa [the city of Lisboa, or Lisbon, the capital of Portugal] has permitted, at the request of the Editorial Committee, that his general reflections on Prince D. Henrique the Navigator, and the discoveries of which he was the author in the 15th century, be republished in the *Annals of the Society*. The Editorial Committee avails itself of this gracious concession without expressing any opinion on the value and importance of that work, because the superiority of the subject, and even more so the name of the author, largely exalts this work”.

Among the geographical discoveries of Prince D. Henrique in the 15th century, the Parcel Islands [later often written as Paracels, referring to the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa reefs in the East Sea], were recorded as a series of entities located within the geographical territory of Cochinchina [in the 15th-16th centuries, the noun Cochinchina also meant Dai Viet or An Nam; from the 17th century, the noun Cochinchina was associated with the meaning of Dang Trong, to distinguish it from Dang Ngoai]. From the discoveries of Prince D. Henrique in the 15th century, including the archipelago called Parcel in Cochinchina, the almanac has the following notes and analysis:

“One scholar says that the island of S. Thomé was discovered in 1405, the island of Principe in 1471, the island of Annoborn in 1526 and the Portuguese took possession of Cofala in 1586. Another view is that the name China [TrungHoa] was invented by the Portuguese. And Bombaim [Bombay, in India] is derived from the Portuguese *buon-bahia* [Bahia good; the state of Bahia is a former Portuguese colony in northeastern Brazil]. The name Siam [Siam, later Thailand] was given to the kingdom by the ignorant Portuguese and the capital was also named by the same name. The names Cochinchina [in the 15th century meaning Dai Viet/An Nam; from the 17th century meaning Dang Trong, from QuangBinh to KhanhHoa today], Siampa [Champa, the current NinhThuan-BinhThuan region] and Camboge [Cambodia, from Dong Nai to Ca Mau-Ha Tien

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Nguyen Thanh Minh,
Expert in East Sea Studies, Hanoi City, Vietnam.

and the interior] were not known to the people in that country... With the same description, the name of the Paracels archipelago [Hoang Sa, including Truong Sa] is the small islands located in front of the east coast of Cochinchina, the Portuguese called it Parcel [another name for Hoang Sa, including Truong Sa], according to the common name, meaning a shoal formed by rocks or rocks rising right above the sea surface..."



Excerpt from the name of the Parcel/Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago associated with the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dai Viet/An Nam from the 15th century in a Portuguese book published in Lisbon in 1841: Association of Maritima and Colonial, Annaesmaritimos e coloniaes, No. 11 - Setembro de 1841, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1841, p. 519-520.

Until the first half of the 19th century, the Paracels [Hoang Sa and Truong Sa] archipelago was always affirmed to be located within the geographical territory of Cochinchina [Dang Trong] in many publications in different fields in many countries in Europe, Asia and America. Typically, during the reign of King Thieu Tri in Dai Nam, there was a publication on the world's international maritime navigation guide in the Kingdom of the Netherlands titled *Zeemans-gidsnaar*, in en uit Oost-Indiën, China, Japan, Australiën, de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Braziliën en tusschenliggende havens [Sailors' Guide to and from the East Indies, China, Japan, Australia, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil and Intermediate Ports] by James Horsburgh, published in Amsterdam in 1841, which mentioned this. Specifically, in the section: "DE PARACELS EN BANKEN, OF GEVAREN IN HET NOORDELIJK GEDEELTE DER CHINEESCHE ZEE" [The Paracel Islands and Shoals, or Dangers in the North China Sea/South China Sea], this navigation guidebook wrote about the Paracel Islands as follows:

"PARACELS [the Paracel Islands, including the Spratlys], or Precella Shoal, was formerly defined as a large, continuous shoal, interspersed with large and small island groups, stretching from south to north, at coordinates from 120 to 160 30' or 170 North latitude [ie running from the Spratlys to the Paracels], approximately 11 to 15 mijlen [sea miles, 1 mijl = 4,829m] from the closest part to the mainland from the coast of Cochinchina [now meaning Dang Trong]. Other shoals or islands, called Amphitrite [An Vinh group of islands], Lincoln [Lincoln Island], etc., lie 30 further east, leaving a large gap between them and the first bank. But it is now certain that all these dangers form the same archipelago, consisting of rocks and low islands, not far from each other. This will be fully

confirmed by the following description by Captains Ross and Maughan [of the Bombay Navy in British India, carried out in the Hoang Sa-Truong Sa area in the years 1807-1809 under the approval of King Gia Long of the Nguyen Dynasty]".

DE PARACELS EN BANKEN, OF GEVAREN IN HET NOORDELIJK GEDEELTE DER CHINEESCHE ZEE.

De PARACELS, of PRECELLA BANKEN, werden vroeger als eene aaneengeschakelde groote bank, met groepen van groote en kleine eilanden voorgesteld, die zich N. en Z. van 12° tot ± 16½° of 17° N. Br. uitstrekten, met het digtstbijgelegene gedeelte op 11 tot 15 Mijlen van de kust van Cochinchina. Andere banken of eilanden, met name de Amphitrite, Lincoln, enz., werden ± 3° verder O. geplaatst, met eene wijde ruimte tusschen haar en de voornoemde bank; doch het is nu zeker, dat alle deze gevaren slechts eene archipel vormen, welke uit banken en lage eilanden bestaat, die niet ver van elkander verwijderd liggen. De volgende beschrijving van Kapt. Ross en Maughan zal dit genoegzaam aantoonen.

Excerpt from the Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago associated with the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dang Trong in a Dutch book published in Amsterdam in 1841: Horsburgh (James), *Zeemans-gidsnaar*, in the territory of Oost-India, China, Japan, Australia, the Kaap de Goede Hoop, Braziliën in the territory of the havens, Amsterdam: C. F. Stemler, 1841, page 899.

2. The recognition of the Paracel/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago as belonging to the sovereignty of the Impero di Annam/Annam Empire in Swiss geography textbooks in the period 1841-1847

In 1846, the Italian-language geography textbook entitled: *Geografia elementare* [Elementary Geography] by scholar/Abbot Luigi Galanti was published in the city of Lugano [the largest Italian-speaking city outside of Italy] in Switzerland. This is a geography textbook used for the learning and teaching of primary school students/teachers in a new version, updated and enhanced with the addition of many important knowledge compared to previous editions. In the preface, the author writes:

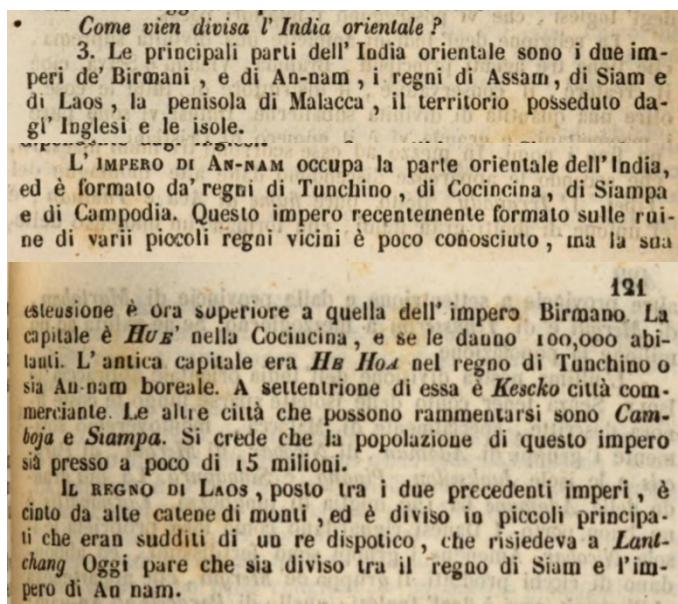
"We have endeavoured to present in this 'Elementary Geography' a brief text for children, intended to arouse their judgment and cultivate their reasoning. It seems that our little work deserves to be well received by the public, for from 1814 to the present (January 1846) fourteen editions have been issued, with a circulation of approximately 38,000 copies... An elementary book should contain only the main and general concepts, which, by their brevity, facilitate instruction, and make it easy to connect other secondary concepts and details to them. Our little book is written in such a way as to give the intelligent teacher an opportunity to develop such principles." In total, the textbook has 71 lessons and 12 chapters for elementary school students/teachers to rely on for learning/teaching and further reading. Each lesson is arranged with questions that show basic issues of world geography knowledge in a systematic manner, accompanied by numbered answers so that learners can easily grasp them and teachers can easily guide them. In Parte I. Mondo Antico [Part I. The Old World] from pages 16 - 138, in Sezione II. Asia [Section II. Asia], in Lezione XII. Dell' India Orientale [Lesson XII. The East Indies], the answer to the question: Come viendivisa l' India Orientale? [How is the East Indies divided?], the book describes the constituent parts of the East Indies and talks about the Annam empire as follows:

"How was East India divided?

The main parts of East India were the two empires of Burma and Vietnam, the kingdoms of Assam [located in the Northeast

region of India], Siam [Siam] and Laos [Laos], the Malacca peninsula - a territory owned by the British, and the islands.

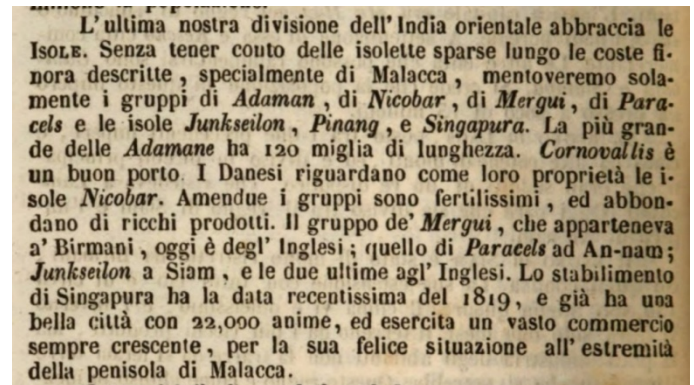
... THE AN NAM EMPIRE was located in the eastern part of India, and was formed by the kingdoms of Tunchino [Dang Ngoai, from Ha Tinh and beyond], Cocincina [Dang Trong, from QuangBinh to Khanh Hoa], Siampa [Champa, the present Ninh Thuan-Binh Thuan region], and Campodia [Cambodia, from Dong Nai to Ca Mau]. This empire was formed recently on the ruins of various small neighboring kingdoms that are little known, but its scale is now larger than that of the Birmano [Myanmar, or Myanmar] empire. Its capital was HÉ [Hue] in Cocincina [Dang Trong], which had 100,000 inhabitants. The ancient capital was HE HOA [Thang Long] in the kingdom of Tunchino [Dang Ngoai] or An-namboreale [Northern Annam]. To the north of the ancient capital was the trading town of Kescko [Ke Cho]. Other towns that may be noted were in Camboja [Cambodia/present-day Dong Nai-Ha Tien region and interior] and Siampa [Champa/present-day NinhThuan-Binh Thuan region]. The population of this empire is said to have been close to 15 million people.



Excerpt describing the constituent parts of the East Indies and the Annamese empire in an Italian book published in the city of Lugano in Switzerland in 1846: Galanti (Luigi), *Geografia elementare*, Nuovissima Edizione, Lugano, 1846, pages 120-121.

Regarding the area of islands and archipelagos in the East Indies, the book identifies the subjects of the archipelagos, including the Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago of the Annam empire, to equip students with basic geographical knowledge as follows: "The last area of the East Indies consists of islands. Apart from the small islands scattered along the coasts described so far, especially in Malacca, we will only mention the Adaman, Nicobar Islands [now all belong to India but are located near Myanmar and Indonesia], Mergui [belonging to Myanmar], Paracels [belonging to Vietnam], and the islands of Junkseilon [belonging to Siam], Pinang, and Singapura [belonging to Malaysia and Singapore]. The largest of these is the Adamane archipelago with a length of 120 miglia [mile, 1 miglia = 1,609m]. Cornovallis is a good port. The Danes considered the Nicobar Islands their property. The natural conditions of the island groups are very fertile, and

there are many products rich in goods. The Mergui Islands, which belonged to the Burmese, are now British; the Paracels [Hoang Sa-Truong Sa] Islands belong to Annam [Vietnam]; Junkseilon is in Siam [Siam], and the last two [Pinang and Singapura] belong to the British. The founding of Singapura [Singapore] is dated most recently to 1819, and it has become a beautiful city of 22,000 inhabitants, and has an extensive and growing trade, because of its favorable situation at the tip of the Malacca peninsula".



*Trích đoạn mô tả các quần đảo vùng Đông Ấn và công nhận quần đảo Paracels/Hoàng Sa-Trường Sa thuộc về đế chế An Nam trong sách giáo khoa địa lý tiếng Italia xuất bản tại thành phố Lugano ở Thụy Sĩ năm 1846: Galanti (Luigi), *Geografia elementare*, op. cit., pagina 122.*

3. In lieu of a conclusion

From the notes and analysis under the title Reflexões geraesacerca do Infante D. Henrique e dos descobrimentos de queellefoiautor no século XV [General information about Prince D. Henrique and his discoveries in the XV century] published in the Maritime and Colonial Yearbook, No. 11, September 1841, in the city of Lisbon, Portugal, it can be affirmed that Portuguese explorers from the Age of Geographical Discovery recorded the name Parcel, the common Portuguese name for the chain of reefs in the sea belonging to the geographical territory of Cochinchina, which at that time meant Dai Viet or An Nam.

Later, the name Paracels was used more commonly and gradually replaced the name Parcel. Until the first half of the 19th century, Paracels/Paracel was still the term used to refer to both the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, before being used only to refer to the Hoang Sa archipelago from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. With the Italian work titled *Geografiaelementare* [Basic Geography] by Luigi Galanti published in the city of Lugano in Switzerland in 1846, it can be affirmed that by that time, the "Paracels"/Hoang Sa archipelago - including Truong Sa, under the sovereignty of the "Impero di An-nam"/An Nam Empire [Vietnam/Dai Nam] had become extremely popular scientific knowledge in the world, so it was included in the official lesson content in geography textbooks used to serve the learning and teaching of primary school students/teachers in Switzerland. The above mentioned objective documents in Portugal and Switzerland during the reign of King Thieu Tri continued to contribute to the thickening of the valuable international historical evidence dossier in recognizing the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos as belonging to Vietnam's sovereignty for many centuries.

REFERENCES

1. Maritime and Colonial Association. 1841. Annaesmaritimos e coloniaes, No 11 - September 1841. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional.
2. Gallant (Louis). 1846. Elementary Geography, New Edition. Lugano.
3. Horsburgh (James). 1841. Seaman's guide to, in and out of the East Indies, China, Japan, Australia, the Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and intermediate ports. Amsterdam: J. F. Stemler.
