

Research Article

THE PARACEL ISLANDS BELONG TO VIETNAM'S SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH PUBLICATIONS ON MEMORIES OF WAR AND DISASTERS AT SEA IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1841 TO 1847

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Abstract

Although he only ruled the country for 7 years, from February 11, 1841 to November 4, 1847, under King Thieu Tri, there were many publications from countries in Europe, America and Asia that continued to show the recognition of the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as being located on the geographical territory and under the sovereignty of the Cochinchina/Dang Trong/Annam/Vietnam empire. This shows that the official state occupation of the Hoang Sa archipelago since the reign of King Gia Long and the activities of exercising sovereignty and sovereign rights of the Vietnamese state related to this archipelago continuously and systematically under the reigns of King Gia Long and King Minh Mang were widely recognized in the international arena, becoming quite popular geographical knowledge in publications and scientific works of many countries in the world in the first half of the 19th century. The following article will introduce to readers publications on memories of war and disasters at sea that demonstrate the recognition of the Paracel/Hoang Sa archipelago as part of the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dang Trong/Vietnam, published in the United States during the period 1841-1847.

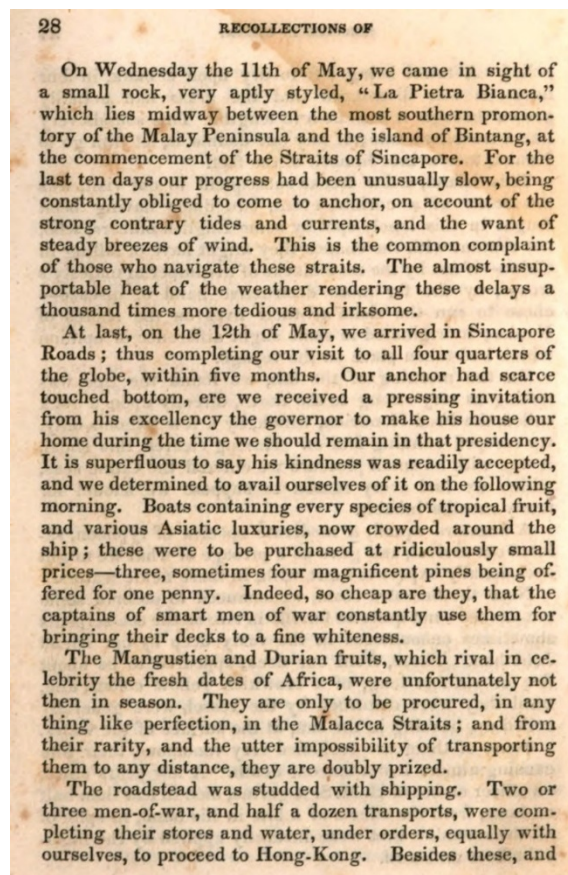
Keywords: Sovereignty, Vietnam, Hoang Sa.

INTRODUCTION

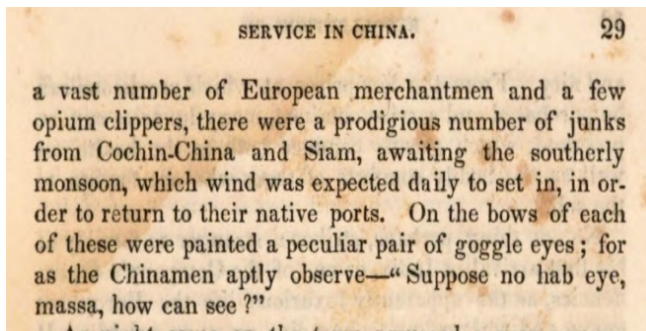
The Paracel Islands/Hoang Sa belong to the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dang Trong/Vietnam through the publication of war memories in the United States in the period 1841-1847

During the "First Opium War" in China (1840-1842), Arthur Augustus Cunyngame was a member of the British reinforcement squadron for the Chinese battlefield in early 1842. At that time, Cunyngame was a captain, assistant to Lord Saltoun - Major General commanding the Queen's army and the British East India Company in China. Although he continued his long military career, later rising to the rank of general, Cunyngame completed his memoirs of the war shortly after the First Opium War and published them in England in 1844 under the title *An aide-de-camp's recollections of service in China, a residence in Hong Kong, and visits to other islands in the Chinese seas*. The appeal and importance of the geographical, commercial, political, military and international relations content of this publication were quickly received by American officials and scholars and were immediately published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1845 under the different title *The Opium War: Being recollections of service in China*. Arthur Cunyngame's story is mainly about his voyage to Asia and his work with the British army fighting in China. But on the way from Singapore to Hong Kong, Cunyngame also mentioned many times the land and people of Cochinchina [Dang Trong, but with a new meaning of all of Vietnam] from his own perspective of observation and comments, before mentioning the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago, including Truong Sa, which belongs to the geographical territory of Cochinchina. At the time when the British reinforcement squadron arrived at Singapore after a long sea voyage to stock up on fresh water and food, before

crossing the South China Sea to the Chinese battlefield, Cunyngame witnessed many Cochinchina trading junks after trading in Singapore/Tan Gia Ba/Ha Chau during the trading season in the first half of the calendar year, anchored, waiting for the southwest monsoon to return home. The author was also impressed with the interesting feature of the Cochinchina junks, when on both sides of the bow of the boat were painted two large bulging eyes. The book wrote:

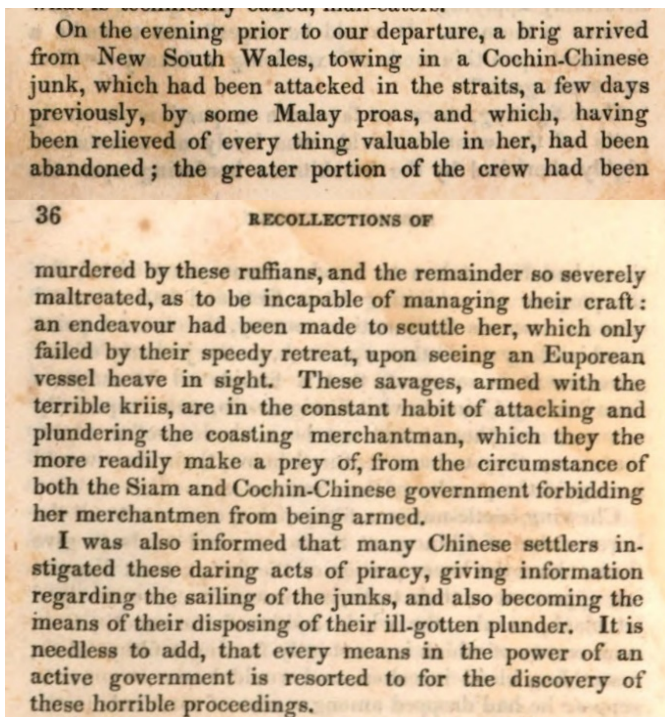


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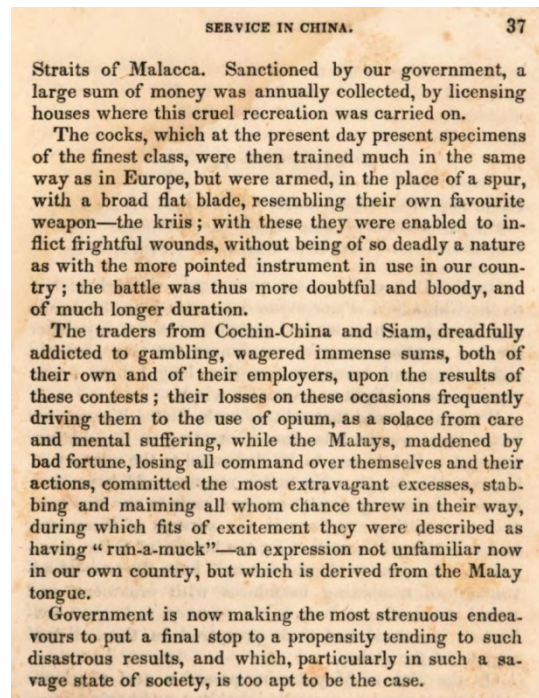
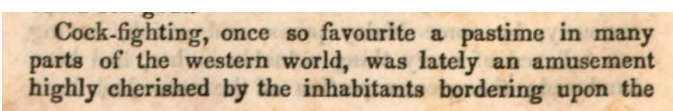
Excerpt showing many Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam trading junks anchored at: *Singapore/Tân Gia Ba/Hà Châu vôi đăc điêm haibêndâu mui thuyêncôvêhai con mắt to lờiratrôngânbântạithànhphô Philadelphia năm 1845: Cunynghame (Arthur Augustus Thurlow), The Opium War: Being recollections of service in China, Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1845, p. 28-29.*

Another story about Cochin-China/Vietnam that Cunynghame also witnessed in Singapore was that the country's unarmed commercial vessels often became the objects of plunder and murder by Malay pirates, with the help of some Chinese merchants who settled in that island nation. The book states:



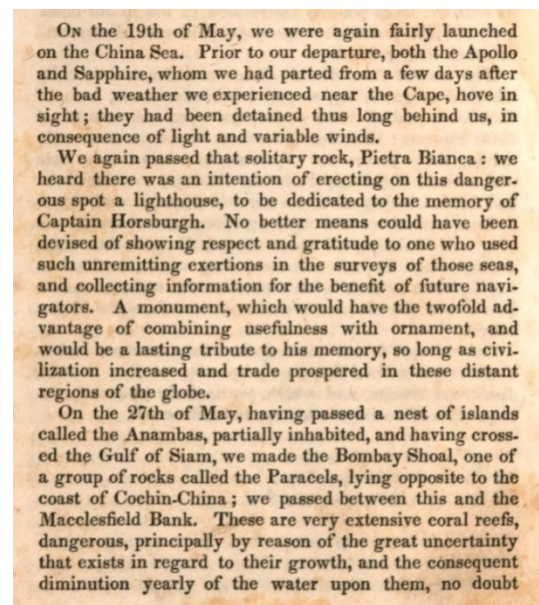
Excerpt showing Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam trading junks being looted and murdered by Malay pirates in the Singapore Strait/Tan Gia Ba/Ha Chau with the help of Chinese merchants settled there in the Philadelphia edition in 1845: Cunynghame, *The Opium War: Being recollections of service in China*, op. cit., p. 35-36.

Also in Singapore, Cunynghame witnessed the passion of Cochin-China/Vietnam trading groups for cockfighting and gambling. Whenever they lost, they would indulge in opium smoke to forget all their worries and sorrows. The author said:



Excerpt showing the passion for cockfighting and opium smoking of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam merchants in Singapore/Tan Gia Ba/Ha Chau in the 1845 Philadelphia edition: Cunynghame, *The Opium War: Being recollections of service in China*, op. cit., p. 36-37.

Finally, on the way of the British fleet from Singapore to Hong Kong for reinforcement, Cunynghame crossed the China Sea/South China Sea and mentioned Bombay Shoal, or Bombay Atoll, which the Vietnamese called Cai Mep Shoal, located in the Binh Nguyen island cluster to the east of the present-day Truong Sa archipelago. According to Cunynghame, Bombay Shoal was an entity located in the Paracels/Hoang Sa group of rocks, meaning that at that time both Hoang Sa and Truong Sa were considered by the world as a large archipelago under the common name of Paracels. The author recognized the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the sovereignty of Cochin-China/Vietnam and described the constant transformation of the coral reefs in this archipelago through the expedition in the South China Sea as follows:



existing that they are becoming daily more extensive. These formations are the labours of an insect not much bigger than an ant, which, with surprising perseverance, raises structures beneath the waters, as stupendous as the Pyramids, and possibly far more lasting.

Excerpt from the recognition of the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam in the Philadelphia edition in 1845: Cunyngame, *The Opium War: Being recollections of service in China*, op. cit., p. 38-39.

The Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago belongs to the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam through the publication of the disaster at sea in the United States in the period 1841-1847

Hoang Sa and Truong Sa in the East Sea are areas that the international maritime community used to call by the common name Paracels and was extremely anxious every time they crossed there, with two constant dangers: tropical storms and reefs. Many ships of different countries have become victims of shipwrecks here. The fame of the Paracels in the East Sea is of course often accompanied by geographical locations for easy identification, and it is often considered internationally as the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam. Charles Ellms's publication, filed by act of the United States Congress in 1841 in the district court of Massachusetts, published in New York City the same year under the title *The tragedy of the seas, or, Sorrow on the ocean, lake, and river, from shipwreck, plague, fire, and famine*, is a collection of many tragic shipwreck stories from around the world, including stories related to the Paracels and Cochin-China/Vietnam.

In Charles Ellms's book, in the story titled: "A Terrible typhoon encountered by the ship *Fanny* in the Chinese Ocean; during which she lost her foremast and rudder", from page 308 - 321, the ship named *Fanny* from England to China in late 1803 encountered a fierce storm in the East Sea, lost both the foremast and rudder, and was fortunate to reach the shore of Hainan Island in early November 1803, but while a group of sailors went ashore to buy repair supplies and food, the ship was hit by a storm again and dragged out to sea, drifted down to Hoang Sa and then sank in Truong Sa. The story of the ship *Fanny* being pushed off Hainan Island, drifting south and then sinking in the Paracels archipelago in the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Vietnam was written by Charles Ellms as follows:

board as a hostage. When under sail, the wind shifted, split the mainsail, and blew the ship off the land. The rudder next broke from the stern, when in thirty fathoms' water, and the vessel, again surrounded by dangers, drifted out to sea, with the Paracels, a dreadful reef, as yet incompletely explored, under the lee. Every hour produced some new hazard, until the ship at length came round upon the opposite tack, and drifted to the south-east, across the southern extremity of the Paracels. She continued advancing in the same direction until the 21st of November, when a new rudder was finished.

Having the ship once more under command inspired confidence among her company, and that night they stood

towards the south-east. At daylight, however, rocks and sands were seen in every direction, and an attempt to get out proving abortive, the anchor was let go. Meantime it was resolved to repair a small Chinese boat to search for a passage through the reefs, nine of which could be counted from the mast-head. Repairing the boat occupied two days, during which, though two anchors were down, the ship was driven nearer the rocks to leeward by every blast, and at times was within a mile of the nearest, over some parts of which the sea broke with great fury. But, on trial, the boat was found to be as leaky as ever, and, as no time could then be lost, one anchor was weighed, and the cable of the other cut to make sail. The reef was now about a hundred yards distant, and sanguine hopes of clearing it were entertained, whereby the ship and the lives of her crew might be saved, when, unfortunately, the wind changed, and drove them right upon it. Every means was practised to avoid the impending danger, though in vain; and at one o'clock, P. M., of the 26th November, 1803, the *Fanny* struck very hard, and continued driving farther on the rocks. The mizzenmast was cut away to prevent her from going to pieces. By this she was relieved, and appeared to be fixed. Being high tide when the vessel struck, nothing was visible except very shoal water; but, as the tide sunk, the rocks began to show their heads, and at low water were dry for several miles around. Where she lay, there were twelve feet water, and she heeled so much, that the yards were cut down from the masts and put overboard as props to support her.

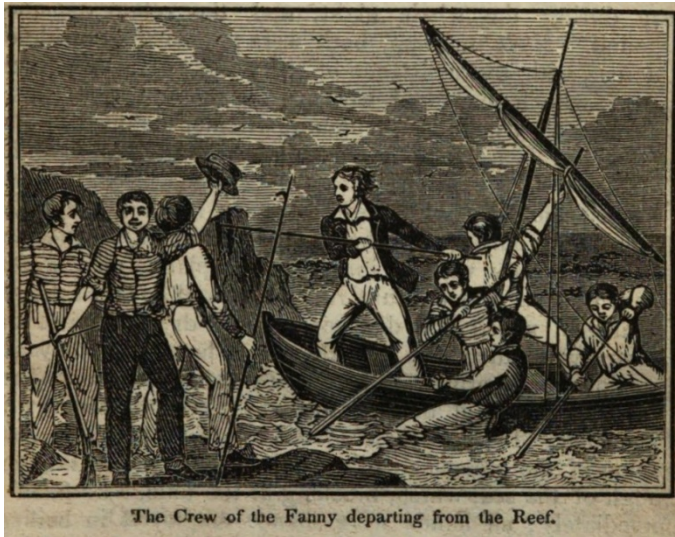
The company of the *Fanny* were here in a most deplorable situation — cast away on a reef formerly unknown, in 9° 44' north latitude, and in 113° 51' east longitude, and distant from Cochin China, the nearest coast, 250 miles. The first land they could make, even had they possessed a boat fit to carry them, was Pulo Auro, distant 850 miles; their numbers consisted of fifty-six persons, and every moment they expected the ship to go to pieces. As yet, however, she proved perfectly tight, and promised to afford a few days more of a miserable existence.

Now, the blacks, half dead with hunger before, were incapable of making any exertion, and the captain, with Mr.

Page, took a glass of wine and water together in the cabin, such as in that situation is commonly called the dying man's glass. Nevertheless, after consulting on the most probable means of preservation, they resolved on cutting off the poop, if the ship should hold together long enough, and forming two flat-bottomed boats out of it. Though scarce expecting to see it completed, the task was set about with alacrity, and aided by all the Lascars but one, who swore he would rather die than do any thing more. Twenty-six bags of rice were now discovered, which proved a salutary relief.

Excerpt from the *Fanny* drifting from Hainan Island and meeting with disaster in the Paracels off Cochin-China in the New York City edition of 1841: Ellms (Charles), *The tragedy of the seas...*, op. cit., p. 311-313.

After nine weeks of extraordinary efforts to overcome starvation, disease and death among the crew, the *Fanny*'s two ends were built into two rafts large enough to hold the 47 survivors on the reefs in the southern part of the Paracels. On January 4, 1804, they left the reefs in a small boat and boarded two rafts, one with 23 Europeans and the other with 24 Indian sailors. Although Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam was the closest, the northeast monsoon had steered the survivors back to the British base in the Straits of Malacca some 850 miles away.



Painting of the victims of the *Fanny* leaving the reefs of the Paracels off Cochin-China in a small boat to board a raft to return to Malacca in the 1841 New York City edition: Ellms (Charles), *The tragedy of the seas...*, op. cit., p. 317.

After nearly a month of drifting at sea, experiencing all kinds of misery from hunger, disease, disappearance, drowning, being almost massacred by Malay pirates on the raft carrying Indian sailors..., at the end of January 1804, the remaining people on the two rafts finally reached Malacca.

In summary, the crew of the *Fanny* initially consisted of 64 people, then 7 more people were added, a total of 71 people participated in the trip. The disaster took the lives of 1 person due to the mast falling during a storm; 5 people died at sea; 1 person died after being swept off the small boat; 1 person died on the reef in the Paracels; 1 person died of poisoning on the raft of the Indian sailors; 1 person died of scurvy [vitamin C deficiency] on the raft of the Europeans;

26 people were murdered by Malay pirates; 6 people were lost when they landed on Hainan Island; 4 people escaped with the longboat on the ship. Thus, of the 71 people who left on the *Fanny*, 36 died, 10 people were missing, and only 25 people survived and returned to Malacca. It was one of the most tragic disasters on the sea in the Paracels archipelago in Cochin-China.

Conclusion

The publications published in the United States during the period 1841-1847 cited in the article not only showed the recognition of the Paracels archipelago (including Hoang Sa and Truong Sa at that time) as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam, but also contributed to describing the special structure of the geographical entities that were in the process of continuous change and the terrible dangers and accidents of navigation in the sea in this archipelago. In addition, the above publications also provide extremely useful historical documents through mentioning the commercial activities and annual trade seasons of Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty in Singapore; the problem of Malay pirates regularly robbing and killing merchant ships of Vietnam and many other countries in this strait, with the help of some Chinese merchants settling there; and the passion for cockfighting, gambling, and opium smoking of Vietnamese merchants in the past.

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