

Research Article

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE VIETNAMESE STATE OVER THE PARACEL ISLANDS THROUGH HISTORICAL SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS, NAVIGATIONAL GUIDES, TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM IN THE PERIOD 1820 – 1840

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Abstract

In addition to official reports, reports, meeting minutes of individuals, agencies, and organizations of a state nature, archives and newspapers in Asia and the East, knowledge reference books, dictionaries, encyclopedias... containing the content of recognizing the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago, including the present Truong Sa archipelago, located on the geographical territory of the Cochin China/Dang Trong/unified Vietnam empire. In the United Kingdom, during the period 1820-1840, there were also a rich source of publications addressing the above content in the fields of historical science, maritime geography and land exploration. In this article, we introduce to readers publications showing the recognition of the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago, including the Truong Sa archipelago, as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam through the genres of historical science, maritime guides, travel and exploration across continents, published in the United Kingdom during the reign of King Minh Mang in Vietnam.

Keywords: Sovereignty, Hoang Sa, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

The Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam through historical science publications and maritime guides in the United Kingdom during the period 1820-1840

In the field of historical science in the United Kingdom in the period 1820-1840, the famous historical work of Alexander Fraser Tytler, also known as Lord Woodhouselee under the title Elements of general history, ancient and modern, consisting of 2 volumes, including an additional chronology, comparison of ancient and modern geography, illustrated maps, was reprinted for the 10th time in London in 1831 with valuable edits and additions by professor of modern history Edward Nares, appointed by the British Royal Family at Oxford University. The preface to this 10th edition was also written by Professor Edward Nares in 1830¹. In the above book, in volume I, section “Comparative View of Ancient and Modern Geography”, from page 324 to page 358, Cochin China [Dang Trong/Vietnam] is classified in the group of countries in the area formerly known as “India beyond the Ganges, now the countries “Pegu, Tonquin, Cochinchina, Siam”². The map “ASIA” attached after this section shows the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago attached to the coast of “Cochin China” [Dang Trong, from Quang Binh onwards], including the sub-regions “Tsiampa” [Champa, Ninh Thuan - Binh Thuan region] and “Cambodia” [Cambodia, Dong Nai - Ha Tien region to the border with Siam]. At the northernmost tip of the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago, connected to the coast of Cochin China/Dang Trong, the map also records the name of the Triangle island group [the old name of the An Vinh/Amphitrite island group in the Hoang Sa archipelago] and the name of Lincoln island [Linh Con].

The map of “ASIA” and the specific excerpt about the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago associated with the coast of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam are as follows:



The complete map of “ASIA” shows the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago attached to the coast of COCHIN CHINA/Dang Trong/Vietnam in the history book published in London in 1831: Tytler (Alexander Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee), Elements of general history, ancient and modern, The Tenth Edition, In two volumes, Volume I, London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1831, p. 360.

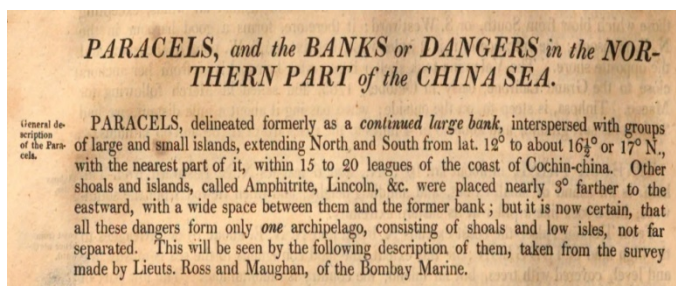


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Excerpt from the map "ASIA" showing the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago attached to the coast of COCHIN CHINA/Dang Trong/Vietnam in a history book published in London in 1831: Tyler (Alexander Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee), op. cit., p. 360.

In the field of astronomy and nautical science, the Paracel Islands were confirmed to belong to the geographical territory of Cochinchina/Dang Trong in the famous work of the Corresponding Member of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences, Honorary Hydrographer of the East India Company, James Horsburgh [1762-1836] under the title India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports. This work was compiled mainly from the original journals of the East India Institute, and from observations and comments made during 21 years of experience of maritime activities in these seas by James Horsburgh. In the 3rd edition published in London in 1826, in volume I, section "PARACELS, and the BANKS or DANGERS in the NORTHERN PART of the CHINA SEA", from page 252 to page 257, the book records the Paracels as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin - China in the general description section as follows: "General description of the Paracels [Hoang Sa].

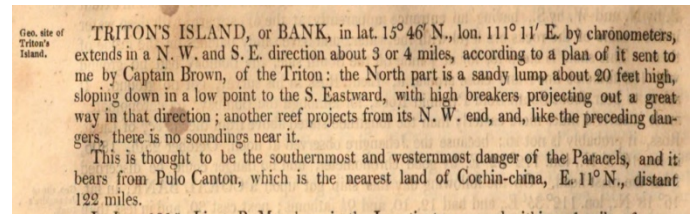
The PARACELS [the Paracel Islands], formerly defined as a large succession of banks, interspersed with groups of large and small islands, extending from north to south, in the coordinates of 120 to 160 30' or 170 North latitude, with the nearest part of the mainland 15 to 20 leagues [sea miles, 1 league = 4,829m] away from it the coast of Cochin-china [Dang Trong]. Other banks or islands, called Amphitrite [the An Vinh group of islands], Lincoln [Lin Con island], etc., lie 30 further to the 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 low rocks and islands, not far from each other. This will be clearly seen from the following description of them, taken from the survey of Captains Ross and Maughan of the Bombay Navy [now Mumbai, in India, carried out in the Hoang Sa-Truong Sa area in the years 1807-1809 under the approval of King Gia Long]"³.



Excerpt from the recognition of the Paracels as part of the maritime geographical territory of Cochin-china in a publication published in London in 1826: Horsburgh (James), India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports, Volume First, Third Edition, London: Printed for the author, and sold by Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1826, p. 252.

Not only affirming in general, but also when describing specifically about the entities belonging to the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago, James Horsburgh's work also identified the

entity closest to the coast of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam as Tri Ton Island. The book records:



The excerpt showing Triton/Tri Tón island in the Paracels archipelago as the entity closest to the coast of Cochin-china is from a publication published in London in 1826: Horsburgh (James), India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports, op. cit., 1826, p. 254.

Then, in 1836, James Horsburgh (James) continued to supplement and edit his work and published a fourth edition with a slightly modified title: India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, Australia, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports⁴. The content on the Paracels archipelago belonging to the maritime geographical territory of Cochin-china continued to be affirmed as in the 1826 edition, but was arranged in volume II. Since this content has not changed, we do not quote additional illustrations⁵.

The Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago belongs to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam through publications on travel and exploration in the continents published in the United Kingdom in the period 1820-1840

Regarding the genre of travel and exploration, in the multi-volume work titled A general history and collection of voyages and travels, which is systematically arranged to form a complete history of the origin and process of maritime activities, geographical exploration, and trade by sea and land, from ancient times to the time of Robert Kerr, a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, an academician of the Edinburgh Academy of Sciences, expressed the content of recognizing the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam.

In the above book, in volume XII, published in Edinburgh and London in 1824; In Part III, Book I, Chapter I, Section XII, pages 107 to 113, the book cites the report of Commodore Byron's voyage on the British ship Dolphin in the years 1764, 1765 and 1766, talking about the Prasil/Pracels/Paracel Islands located in the geographical territory of Cochin China as follows:

"On the 24th [October 24, 1766], at the coordinates 16° 59' North latitude and 113° 01' East longitude, we carefully observed the Triangles [Triangle Group, the ancient name of the Amphitrite Group, in the Paracel Islands] without a headland, located at the northernmost extremity of Prasil [Paracel], and forming a most dangerous shoal.

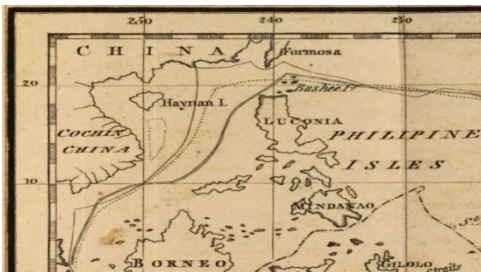
Prasil, or Pracels [Paracel], is a group of rocks and islets, about 60 miles off the coast of Cochin China [Dang Trong] [1 mile = 1,609m] to the east, and is considered very dangerous to navigators, on account of its swells and easterly currents"⁶.

On the 24th, being in latitude $16^{\circ} 59'$ N. longitude $115^{\circ} 1'$ E. we kept a good look-out for the Triangles, which lie without the north end of the Prasil, and form a most dangerous shoal.¹ On the 30th we saw several trees and large

¹ The Prasil, or Pracels, is a congeries of rocks and small islands, about sixty miles eastward of the coast of Cochin China, and reckoned very dangerous to navigators, on account of breakers and counter currents.—E.

Excerpt from the recognition of the Prasil/Pracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam in a publication published in Edinburgh and London in 1824: Kerr (Robert), A general history and collection of voyages and travels, Volume XII, Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1824, p. 108.

In addition to affirming that the Paracel Islands belong to the geographical territory of Dang Trong, Robert Kerr also illustrated with a map attached to the publication showing the area of the Prasil/Pracels/Paracel Islands lying along the territorial waters of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam as follows:



Excerpt from the map delineating the Prasil/Pracels/Hoang Sa archipelago along the territorial waters of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam in a publication published in Edinburgh and London in 1824: Kerr (Robert), A general history and collection of voyages and travels, op. cit., p. 2.

In particular, a geographical publication by an American soldier who personally traveled and surveyed the field [in 1819] in Vietnam was the work of US Navy Captain John White titled *A voyage to Cochin China*, published in London in 1824, which also showed the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam.⁷ This book, originally not intended for publication, was written as a memoir to be deposited in the archives of the "Salem East India Marine Society". However, some of the author's friends who read the manuscript, among them John Pickering, who wholeheartedly helped John White, thought it was very qualified and of general interest to be published; for it seems that "the adventure of the Franklin and the Marmion were the first American ships to sail the Don-nai [Dong Nai] River and to fly the Stars and Stripes before the city of Saigon [Saigon]"⁸. John White's book was published in the United States first, and soon after it was published in England.

In John White's book, in chapter VII: Passage to the Philippine Islands, Paracels, from page 95 to page 111, it is stated that the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago belongs to the geographical territory of Cochin-China/Dang Trong/Vietnam as follows:

"From the 18th to the 24th of June [1819], we operated southward along the coast [in Dang Trong], which was determined to be far to the windward of the group of islands and shoals, called the Paracels [Hoang Sa], which we thought

would probably afford sufficient wind to reach Manilla [a city in the Philippines]. And, on the second day, having reached the coordinates of 14° North latitude, and after having seen the city of Quin-hone [Qui Nhon], we set sail from the coast of Cochin-China [Dang Trong], and set course towards Luçonia [Luconia Shoals, south of the Spratly Islands]. We had pleasant weather, and the wind from the land and the sea blew evenly along the coast, with a strong current against us to the northwest. "The Paracels, just mentioned, formerly and indeed until recently the terror of navigators, are represented as a continuous chain of low islands, reefs and sandbanks, extending from 12° to 17° N. latitude [roughly corresponding to the Spratlys to the Paracels], in a north-northeast and south-south-west direction, forming a figure resembling a man's foot (the toe being the southernmost), and about 16 leagues from the coast of Cochin China; at its widest part, at about 16° N. latitude, it is represented as being about 30 leagues in breadth. This archipelago, once formidable in its magnitude and terrible in character, is now defined as a group of islands and reefs, of not very great extent, with mostly good and safe channels between them, and many good anchorages. They lie between $15^{\circ} 46'$ and $17^{\circ} 6'$ North latitude; and between $111^{\circ} 12.5'$ and $112^{\circ} 42'$ East longitude [i.e. the Paracel Islands are only within this reduced coordinate range].

Early on the morning of the 25th, we passed through a deep, blue sea, marked on the old charts by many rocks and shoals. The recent investigations, discoveries and surveys of these waters by Captains Ross and Maughan of the Bombay Navy [in British India] on the survey ships *Discovery* and *Investigator* [in the years 1807-1810 under King Gia Long] have brought accurate charts and useful information; thus this navigation has been made less laborious and dangerous"⁹.

FROM the 18th to the 24th of June we were employed in working to the southward along the coast, it having been determined to pass far to windward of the group of islands and shoals called the Paracels, which we thought would probably ensure us a free wind to Manilla; and at the latter date having gained the latitude of 14° north, and being then in sight of Quin-hone city, we took a departure from the coast of Cochin China, and shaped our course for Luçonia. We had pleasant weather and regular land and sea breezes along the coast, with a strong current setting against us to the north-west.

The Paracels, just mentioned, were formerly, and indeed till very recently, dreaded by navigators, being represented as one continued chain of low islands, coral reefs, and sand banks, extending from the latitude of 12° to that of 17° north, in a north-north-east and south-south-west direction, forming a fancied resemblance to the human foot (the toe of which was the southernmost extremity), and approaching to within about sixteen leagues of the

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coast of Cochin China; in its widest part, in the latitude of about 16° north, it was represented as about thirty leagues over. This archipelago, once so formidable from its great imaginary extent and terrific character, is now ascertained to be a group of islands and reefs, of no great extent, with good and safe channels between most of them, and in many places good anchorage. They lie between the latitudes of $15^{\circ} 46'$ and $17^{\circ} 6'$ north; and from longitude $111^{\circ} 12.5'$ to $112^{\circ} 42'$ east.

Early in the morning of the 25th, we passed over an azure and fathomless sea, where, in the old charts, are marked rocks and shoals in great profusion. The recent investigations, discoveries, and surveys in these seas, by Lieutenants Ross and Maughan, of the Bombay marine, in the surveying ships, *Discovery* and *Investigator*, have been productive of correct charts and useful information, by which this navigation has been rendered much less arduous and dangerous.

Excerpt from the recognition of the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam in a book published in London in 1824: White (John), *A voyage to Cochin China, London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824, p. 95-96.*

As for William Adams, his work titled *The modern voyager and traveler, through Europe, Asia, Africa, and America* published in London in 1828 also recognized and affirmed similar things about the relationship between the Paracels/Hoang Sa and Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam. In volume II of the book, in chapter XX, in the section about the multifaceted good and bad character of the Chinese people, the author recorded the story of Captain Daniel Ross of the British East India Company rescuing victims on a Chinese junk that sank in the Hoang Sa archipelago, during a survey there in 1809 by the Discovery ship under the approval of King Gia Long of Vietnam. The victims were brought by Captain Ross to Da Nang to hand over to the Hue court, and the Vietnamese government rescued, cared for and arranged for the victims to return to their country. Later, during a landing at the Chinese town of Xiamen, one of the victims recognized Captain Ross and happily greeted and thanked him. This story indirectly showed that the Paracel Islands/Hoang Sa were under the administration of the state of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam. The excerpt from the book reads as follows:

"... Captain Ross, commander of the Discovery of the East India Company, gave another instance. While surveying [in 1809, with the approval of Emperor Gia Long] the rocks called the Paracels [the Hoang Sa archipelago], off the coast of Cochin China [Dang Trong/Vietnam], he saw the wreck of a large Chinese junk [wrecked there]; and on approaching closer to observe, he saw on a treeless rock, not more than fifty fathoms [sai, 1 fathom = 1.82m] long, a group of people, numbering several hundred, had escaped from the wreck, apparently dying of starvation. With great difficulty they were conveyed [on board the Discovery], eight or ten at a time, from this deserted spot, where they remained for four days, and were all brought safely to the opposite coast of Cochin China [Dang Trong/Vietnam]. Some time later, while Captain Ross was surveying the southeastern coast, in the Strait of Formosa [Taiwan], he landed at a small town not far from Aimoy [Xiamen, in the province of Fujian in China]. As he passed through a street, he was noticed by a young man, who ran up, knelt down, and eagerly embraced his feet. It appeared that he was one of those who had been rescued from a dangerous situation on the Paracels [Paracel Islands]. He introduced his rescuer to the townspeople who surrounded Captain Ross; it brought him blessings from all sides, and nothing in the place was considered too good for him.¹⁰

Captain Rose, the commander of the East India Company's ship, the Discovery, has furnished another. While surveying those rocks called the Paracels, off the coast of Cochin China, he perceived the wreck of a large Chinese junk; and approaching nearer, observed, on a barren rock, not above fifty fathoms in length, a group of people, amounting to several hundreds, who had escaped the wreck, apparently to perish by famine. With the utmost difficulty they were taken, by eight or ten at a time, from this desolate spot, where they had remained four days, and all landed safe on the opposite coast of Cochin China.

Some time after this, when Captain Ross was surveying the south-eastern coast, on the strait of Formosa, he landed at a small town not far from Aimoy: on passing through one of the streets, he was noticed by a young man, who ran up to him, threw himself on his knees, and eagerly embraced his legs. It appeared he was one of those released from the dangerous situation on the rock of the Paracels; he made known his liberator to the townspeople, who crowded round the captain, loading him with blessings on every side, and nothing that the place afforded was considered too good for him.

Excerpt showing the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago under the administration of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam in a publication published in London in 1828: Adams (William), *The modern voyager and traveller, through Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, Volume II – Asia, London: Printed for Fisher, Son, and Co, 1828, p. 391.*

During the reign of King Minh Mang in Vietnam, William Adams's work was published in 4 volumes in 1831. and 1835 in London^{11,12}, but the story content and page numbers remained the same as the 1828 version, so we do not quote them here.

Conclusion

The publications in the genres of historical science, navigational instructions, travel and exploration across continents published in the United Kingdom in the period 1820-1840 cited above, whether directly or indirectly, all demonstrate consistency in recognizing the Paracels/Hoang Sa archipelago as belonging to the geographical territory of Cochin China/Dang Trong/Vietnam. They, along with publications in many other genres published in the United Kingdom during this period, form one of the important sets of international documents demonstrating Vietnam's long-standing sovereignty over the Hoang Sa archipelago, which continued under the reign of King Minh Mang.

Note

1. In the article, the words in parentheses (...) are from the original text quoted; the words in brackets [...] are ours to translate/explain directly to help readers follow. In cases where longer explanations or illustrations are needed, we number the notes. Some entries and place names are also used verbatim from the original text, with notes in brackets [...], so that readers can have a direct sense of the etymology in the cited documents.
2. Tytler (Alexander Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee), *Elements of general history, ancient and modern, The Tenth Edition, In two volumes, Volume I, (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1831), 344.*
3. Horsburgh (James), *India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports, Volume First, Third Edition, (London: Printed for the author, and sold by Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1826), 252, 254.*
4. Horsburgh (James), *India directory, or, Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, Australia, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports, Volume Second, Fourth Edition, (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1836), p. 331-336.*
5. Kerr (Robert), *A general history and collection of voyages and travels, Volume XII, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1824), 108.*
6. John White's rank was lieutenant. In the army, lieutenant was the rank of lieutenant, but in the navy, captain.
7. White (John), *A voyage to Cochin China, (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), vi, 95-96.*
8. Adams (William), *The modern voyager and traveler, through Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, Volume II – Asia, (London: Printed for Fisher, Son, and Co, 1828), 391.*

9. Adams (William), The modern voyager and traveler throuht Erope, Asia, Africa, and America, In four volumes, Volume II – Asia, (London: Henry Fisher, Son, and P. Jackson, 1831).
10. Adams (William), The modern voyager and traveller, throuht Erope, Asia, Africa, and America, In four volumes, Volume II – Asia, (London: Printed for Fisher, Son, and Co, 1835).
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6. Kerr (Robert). 1824. *A general history and collection of voyages and travels*. Volume XII. Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell.
7. Tytler (Alexander Fraser, Lord Woodhouselee). 1831. *Elements of general history, ancient and modern*. The Tenth Edition. In two volumes. Volume I. London: Printed for T. Cadell.
8. White (John). 1824. *A voyage to Cochin China*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green.
