

## THE PARACEL AND STRATTLE ISLANDS BELONG TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF VIETNAM THROUGH PUBLICATIONS ON GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN IN THE PERIOD OF 1841-1847

\*Dr. Nguyen Thanh Minh

East Sea Research Expert, Km No. 1, Ha Cau Street, Ha Dong District, Hanoi City, Viet Nam

Received 07<sup>th</sup> February 2025; Accepted 09<sup>th</sup> March 2025; Published online 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### Abstract

During the reign of King Thieu Tri in Dai Nam, Vietnam, the "First Opium War" in China from 1840-1842 was not only the focus of attention of the Far Eastern countries, but also the focus of attention from the European and American public opinion. Many scholars and publishers in the continents of Europe, Asia, and America continuously published scientific publications on geography, navigation, commerce, history, etc. to promptly meet the need for knowledge of the era about China and related countries in this vast region of Asia. In that context, the Kingdom of Spain, a Western colonial power that had a foothold in the Philippines since the 16th century, also published many works about Asian countries, including publications that mentioned the "Parace-los"/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago located in the geographical territory of Cochinchina, Dang Trong under the sovereignty of the Annam Empire (now Vietnam) since 1816.

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

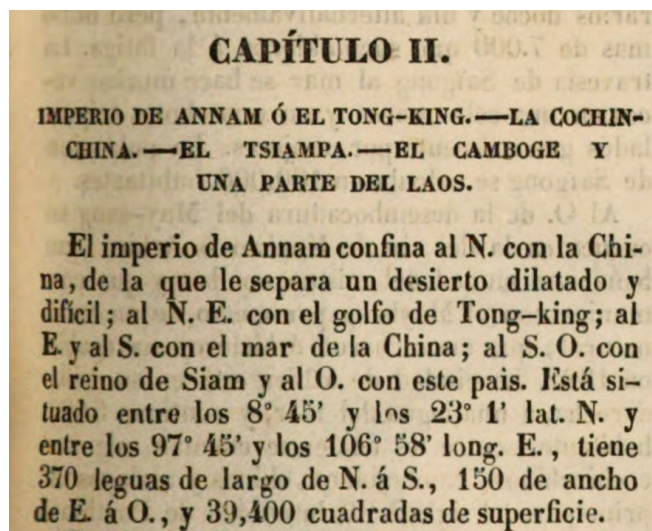
### INTRODUCTION

#### On the territorial divisions, maritime activities and international trade of the Annamese Empire through publications on geographical and historical discoveries in the Kingdom of Spain in the period 1841-1847

The leading publication in Spain in the period 1841-1847 mentioning the Parace-los/Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago of the Annamese Empire is the work entitled *Viajepintoresco á las dos Américas, Asia y África* [A living journey to the two Americas - North America and South America, Asia and Africa], published in Barcelona, Catalunya in 1842. This Spanish edition is based on the work compiled in French by Alcide Dessalines d'Orbigny, Naturalist and Jean Baptiste Benoît Eyriès, Geographer, both French. This is a comprehensive work based on a general summary of all the voyages and discoveries of the explorers Colon, Magallanes, Las Casas, Gomara, La Condamine, Ulloa, Jorje Juan, Humboldt, Molina, Cabot, Grijalva, Koempfer, Marco Polo, Forster, Chardin, Tournefort, Volney, JaLoubère, Chateaubriand, Caillé, Lander ...; illustrated with geographical maps, various portraits and 600 beautiful images drawn by M. de Sainson and Julio Boilly, and engraved on steel plates by the best French artisans. The Spanish edition printed in Barcelona in 1842 also retains these original exquisite images. In "TOMO III" [Volume III], in the section "VIAJE PINTORESCO POR EL ASIA" [A Lively Journey Through Asia], at the beginning of Chapter II, from pages 13 - 19, the book introduces the territorial parts that make up the empire, the geographical location, the coordinate range and the territorial area of the entire Annam Empire as follows:

"CAPITULO II. IMPERIO DE ANNAM Ó EL TONG-KING, LA COCHINCHINA, EL TSIAMPA, EL CAMBOGE Y UNA PARTE DEL LAOS [Chapter II. The Annam Empire or Dang Ngoai/Ha Tinh to the North, Dang Trong/QuangBinh-KhanhHoa, Champa/NinhThuan-BinhThuan, Cambodia/Dong Nai-Ha Tien and the interior, and a part of Laos].

The Annam Empire borders China to the north, separated by a large and rugged desert; to the northeast is the golfo de Tong-king [Gulf of Dong Kinh/Dang Ngoai]; to the east and south is the mar de la China [China Sea/East Sea]; to the southwest and west are the reino de Siam [Kingdom of Siam]. It lies within the coordinates of 8° 45' and 23° 1' North latitude, and from 97° 45' to 106° 58' East longitude, 370 leguas [sea miles, 1 legua = 4,829m] long from north to south and 150 leguas wide from east to west, with an area of 39,400 square sea miles" [OrbignyAlcide Dessalines de, 1842].



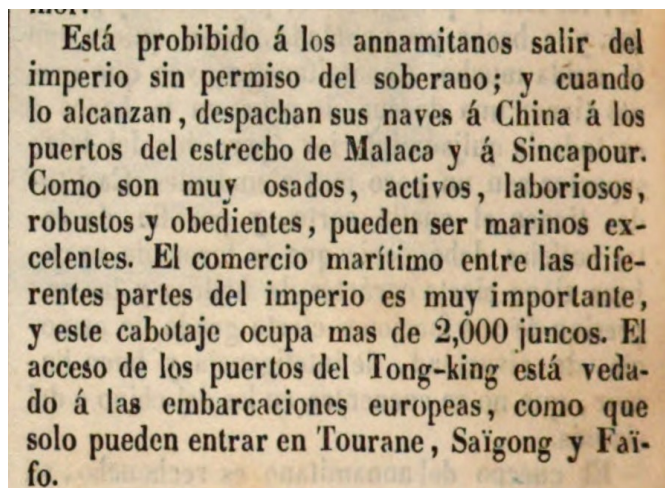
\*Corresponding Author: Dr. Nguyen Thanh Minh,

East Sea Research Expert, Km No. 1, Ha Cau Street, Ha Dong District, Hanoi City, Vietnam.

*Excerpt describing the territorial divisions, geographical location, coordinate range and area of the entire Annam Empire in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1842: Orbigny (Alcide Dessalines de), Eyriès (Jean Baptiste Benoît), Viajepintoresco á las dos Américas, Asia and África, Tomo III, Barcelona: Imprenta y Librería de Juan Oliveres, 1842, p. 13.*

With a long and diverse coastline, located on a busy trade route, the maritime activities and international trade of the Annam Empire were highly valued. In Volume III of the publication *Viajepintoresco á las dos Américas, Asia y África* [A lively journey to the two Americas - North and South America, Asia and Africa], travelers reported that the Annamese people were capable of becoming excellent sailors, that inland maritime trade between regions in the empire was very busy, that two-way trade with foreign countries was also carried out regularly, but all had certain limits on the locations open to Western ships and that the export of native ships to other countries was always under the strict control of the Annam government. The book states:

“The Annamites [Annamites] were forbidden to leave the empire without the permission of the authorities; and when they had done so, they sent ships to China, to the ports of the Strait of Malacca and to Sincapour [Singapore]. Since the Annamites were bold, active, industrious, strong and obedient, they could become excellent sailors. Maritime trade between the different regions of the empire [Annamites] was very important and these voyages involved more than 2,000 ships. European ships were forbidden to approach the ports of Tong-king [Dong Kinh/Dang Ngoai] because they were only allowed to enter the ports of Tourane [Da Nang], Saïgong [Saigon] and Faïfo [Hoi Pho/Hoi An]”.



Está prohibido á los annamitanos salir del imperio sin permiso del soberano; y cuando lo alcanzan, despachan sus naves á China á los puertos del estrecho de Malaca y á Sincapour. Como son muy osados, activos, laboriosos, robustos y obedientes, pueden ser marinos excelentes. El comercio marítimo entre las diferentes partes del imperio es muy importante, y este cabotaje ocupa mas de 2,000 juncos. El acceso de los puertos del Tong-king está vedado á las embarcaciones europeas, como que solo pueden entrar en Tourane, Saïgong y Faïfo.

*Excerpt from a description of maritime activities and international trade in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1842: Orbigny (Alcide Dessalines de), Eyriès (Jean Baptiste Benoît), op. cit., p. 18.*

The goods that meet the domestic and export trade needs of the Annam Empire are extremely diverse, including handicrafts, products from cultivation and livestock, minerals from the ground, forest products from the mountains and forests, and aquatic products from rivers and the sea. Particularly, products from the sea and islands in Dang Trong have a very famous specialty: bird's nest, a dish considered by the Chinese to be of the highest quality and always has a high value in the domestic

and international markets. These items are described quite specifically in the Spanish publication entitled *Viajepintoresco al rededor del mundo* [A living journey around the world] published for the second time in Barcelona in 1841, on the basis of inheriting the general summary of the journeys and discoveries everywhere of the travelers Magallanes, Tasman, Dampier, Ansen, Byren, Wallis, Carteret, Bougainville, Cook, Lapérouse, G. Bligh, Vancouver, D' Entrecasteaux, Wilson, Baudin, Flinders, Krusenstern, Porter, Kotzebue, Freycinet, Bellinghausen, Basil Hall, Duperrey, Paulding, Beechey, Dumont d'Urville, Lutke, Dillon, Laplace, B. Morrell... which was compiled in French under the direction of Captain M. Dumont d'Urville in 1834, illustrated with drawings geographical maps, various portraits and six hundred beautiful photographs drawn by M. de Sainson and engraved on steel plates by the best French artisans.

In the above publication, in “TOMO I” [Volume I], in “CAPÍTULO XXVIII. COCHINCHINA: HISTORIA Y GEOGRAPHÍA [Chapter XXVIII: Dang Trong: History and Geography], from pages 228 - 239, the book writes about the domestic and export trade of the Annamese Empire, including the famous bird's nest specialty as follows:

“The products of the land vary according to the latitude, but the most abundant and valuable are rice, corn, sweet potatoes and coconuts. Areca, betel and tobacco are the plants commonly used in the region, grown in many places. The most highly valued fruits are oranges and lychees. Sugarcane, a crop which has made rapid progress, supplies 40,000 pikouls [1 quintal, 1 pikoul = 60.5 kg] for export. Anil verde or dina-xaag, cotton, cinnamon, tea, black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon products according to demand, can by themselves create the wealth of a country.

The mulberry plantations developed sericulture, which supplied some of the poor quality Chinese cloth. The natives exploited some of the saltwater plants for their delicacies, such as salicornia [sea asparagus], bacalamarítima [sea cod], and sablina. They also ate some fucacas. Besides fish, which was their most common food, many other molluscs were also caught, especially boloturias, called tripans by the Malays, and bichos do mar [sea cucumbers] by the Portuguese, a delicacy highly prized by the Malays. Los nidos de salanganas [swallow's nests], the luxurious bird's nests of the Chinese, were abundant throughout this rugged coast.

The mountains, which, in addition to some mines of iron, gold, and silver, contained deep and beautiful forests, which were the country's chief wealth. It is here that rosewood, ironwood, ebony, vang wood, sandalwood, agarwood and calambuco [kynam] are found. This last in particular is the most precious and expensive. In Biub-Kiang grows a beautiful tree called *Aloexylumverum*, from which is obtained a sweet and fragrant adhesive called calambuco, or in Cochinchino [Dang Trong] Kinan [kynam]. Paper is made from the bark of this tree. The forest also provides some valuable substances, such as shellac [candle], produced by ants on *Croton lacciferum*, and dracaena resin, obtained from many trees and especially from *Dracenaferrea*; finally, tallow, whose thick, white oil [palm wax] makes very beautiful candles”.



Los productos del suelo se modifican según las latitudes, pero los más abundantes y preciosos son el arroz, el maíz, la batata y la nuez de coco. El arec, el betel y el tabaco, cuyo uso es general en la comarca, producen asimismo abundantes cosechas. Los frutos más apreciados son la naranja y el lichi. La caña dulce, cuyo cultivo ha hecho progresos rápidos suministra 40.000 pikouls para la exportación. El añil verde ó *dina-xaag*, que por sí solo podría hacer la riqueza de un país, el algodón, la canela, el té, la pimienta negra, el cardamomo, el cinamomo producen á pedir de boca. Las plantaciones de moreras han desarrollado la educación de los gusanos de seda y la fabricación de algunos tejidos inferiores á los de la China. Los naturales sacan un buen alimento de algunas plantas salinas, tales como la salicornia, la bacala marítima y la sablina; igualmente comen algunas fucacas. A más del pescado que constituye su alimento más habitual, se procuran diversos moluscos, y en especial las holoturias, conocidas por los Malayos bajo el nombre de *tripans*, y por los Portugueses bajo el de *bitchos do mar*, plato muy estimado de los pueblos Malayos. Los nidos de salanganas, este lujo de los Apicines chinos, abundan en toda esta costa fragosa. Las montañas, á más de algunas minas de hierro, de oro y de plata, tienen hermosas y profundas selvas, riqueza principal del país. En ellas es donde se encuentran el palo de rosa, hierro, ébano, sapan, sándalo, de águila y calambuco. Este último en especial es el más precioso y más caro de todos. En el Biuh-Kiang crece el hermoso árbol llamado *Aloexylum verum*, del cual se saca esta concreción resinosa y aromática llamada calambuco ó en cochinchino *Kinan*. Con la corteza de este árbol se fabrica papel. Los bosques suministran además algunas sustancias preciosas, tales como la goma laca, elaborada por hormigas sobre el *Croton lacciferum*, y la goma

de sangre de drago, sacada de muchos árboles y con especialidad del *Dracena ferrea*, por fin el árbol de sebo, cuyo aceite espeso y blanco sirve para velas de hermosa apariencia.

Excerpt describing commercial products including bird's nests in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1841: Dumont d'Urville (Jules Sébastien César), *Viajepintoresco al rededor del mundo*, Segunda Edición, Tomo I, Barcelona: Imprenta y Librería de Juan Oliveres, 1841, p. 238.

### Islands, reefs and the occupation of the Parace-los/Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos by the Annam/Vietnam Empire through publications on geographical and historical discoveries in the Kingdom of Spain in the period 1841-1847

Regarding the islands and reefs located in the maritime territory under the sovereignty of the Annam Empire, or officially declared by the Annam Empire to be in state possession, in Chapter II, Volume III of the work *Viajepintoresco á las dos Américas, Asia y África* [A living journey to the two Americas - North America and South America, Asia and Africa] it is stated as follows:

“Many islands are under the sovereignty of the Annam Empire; and to the south-southeast of Hainan Island, notably the Parace-los [Hoang Sa and Truong Sa], which consists of a long chain of coral reefs that are very dangerous because of the shoals that surround them. It is true that there are no people

living there; but because they are inhabited by many sea turtles and fish, so that the emperor of Annam took possession of them in 1816 without any neighboring country contesting them.

In the bay of Tourane [Da Nang], several granite islands are visible, including Poulo-Canton or Collao-roi [CùlaoRé or Cùlao Ray, belonging to Quảng Ngãi] and Kham-collao [CùlaoChàm, belonging to Quảng Nam]. The whole coast, going south, is also bordered by more precarious islands. Twenty-five leagues [sea miles, 1 legua = 4,829m] south of the mouth of the May-kang [Mekong] is Poulo-Condor [Đảo Côn Lôn/ Côn Đảo], four leagues long and a quarter of a league broad; and on its eastern coast there is a very good space formed by a channel separating it from a small island. This large island is surrounded by several islets and has no springs; but despite its aridity, there were still some inhabitants, refugees from the neighboring continent, and those who lacked sweet potatoes and other products from the country. The English wanted to settle there in 1702 to establish a contraband trading post with China, but failed.

Poulo-Oubi [Hon Khoai] isleguas south of Cape Camboge [Cape Ca Mau] and is also surrounded by a group of wooded cliffs”.

Muchas islas dependen del imperio de Annam, y al S. S. E. de Hainan se notan los Parace-los que son una dilatada serie de escollos peligrosísimos por los bajíos que les circundan. Verdad es que están inhabitados; mas como abundan en tortugas y peces, el emperador de Annam tomó posesion de ellos en 1846 sin que sus vecinos dijese esta boca es mia.

Cabe la bahía de Tourane se ven muchas islas de granito, entre ellas Poulo-Canton ó Collao-roi y Kham-collao: Toda la costa, yendo al S., está orillada igualmente de islas á cual más peñascosa. A 25 leguas S. de la desembocadura del May-kang está Poulo-Condor que tiene cuatro leguas de largo sobre tres cuartos de legua de ancho, y su costa oriental ofrece un muy buen surgidero formado por un canal que la separa de un islote. Esta isla montañosa está rodeada de varios islotes y carece de fuentes; pero no obstante su aridez contiene algunos habitantes, refugiados del vecino continente, y que se nutren pobremente con patatas y otras producciones del país. Los ingleses quisieron establecerse allá en 1702 para hacer un depósito de comercio de contrabando con la China, pero en balde. Poulo-Oubi está á cinco leguas S. del promontorio del Camboge y rodeada igualmente de un grupo de peñas arbolado.

Excerpt describing the islands, reefs at sea and the occupation of the Paracel/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago by the Annam Empire in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1842: Orbigny (Alcide Dessalines de), *Eyriès* (Jean Baptiste Benoît), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

In addition to the description of the islands, reefs and the occupation of the “Parace-los” archipelago by the Annamese emperor, in the section “Alphabetical and Analytical Table of Geographical Names, Names of Individuals, Tribes and Notable Entities Mencionados En Vie Pintoresco Por El ASIA” [Alphabetical and Analytical Table of Geographical Names, Names of Notable Individuals, Peoples and Entities Mencionados En Vie Pintoresco Por El ASIA], the book also places the “Paracels” archipelago in the letter “P” section with



the summary attribute of being a reef on the coast of the Annamese empire. Specifically: "Paracels [Hoang Sa and Truong Sa], a reef on the coast of Annam [An Nam/Vietnam]".

*Paracels, rocas de la costa de Annam, III, 14.*

*Excerpt from the table of geographical names confirming that the Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago is a reef off the coast of Annam in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1842: Orbigny (Alcide Dessalines de), Eyriès (Jean Baptiste Benoît), op. cit., p. 233.*

Similarly, in the publication *Viaje pintoresco al rededor del mundo* [A living journey around the world] by Dumont d'Urville, published for the second time in Barcelona in 1841, cited above, the book also describes the islands and reefs on the coast of Cochinchina in close relation to the Paracel/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago in the geographical territory of this country. In "TOMO I" [Volume I], in "CAPITOL XXVII. COCHINCHINA: TOURANNE - HUE" [Chapter XXVII: Dang Trong: Da Nang - Hue], from pages 222-228, the book writes about the islands, reefs and the Paracels/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago in the territorial waters of Dang Trong as follows:

"In Kandyu [Can Gio, the seaport into the Saigon River], we have obtained a considerable supply of very abundant delicious fruits in the country. With only a few pesos [Spanish money], Norberg [Baron, traveler] had obtained many baskets of oranges, bananas, apples, and huge baskets full of fish of all kinds. Provisioned and refreshed, we set out the same day. A strong and favorable wind preserved our progress. At a fair distance from the edge of the mountain running from northeast to southwest, we passed the water between Cow Island [Hon Ba, in Ba Ria-Vung Tau] and the Brito reef, named after the Portuguese navigator who was lost there; and we passed Cabo Pandaran [Cape Dinh/Ca Na, 40 km south of Phan Rang], as stormy as Cabo de Buena Esperanza [Cape of Good Hope], under the roar of the waves that crashed around it. This cape actually forms a kind of bend in the China Sea [Chinese Sea/East Sea]; and when we had passed it, we changed course so that the boat pushed all the way north. As we advanced into the stretch of water between the coast of Cochinchina [Dang Trong] and the islets known as the Paracels [Hoang Sa and Truong Sa], the southwest wind, muffled by the high peaks of the mainland, blew only intermittently: now it sank into those gorges, then broke off partly to the northwest, blew along the coast, and almost turned southeast after a compass reversal. In the midst of these constant changes, we could freely view the land that stretched parallel to the ship, high and rugged, allowing us to foresee innumerable gaps in its deep cuts; a land that had been carefully surveyed by the naval officer Dayot, a deceased Frenchman, a mandarin of the last king of Cochinchina [meaning Nguyen Anh or Gia Long]. Thus the fleet passed in turn the bay of Ya-Trang [Nha Trang] located at 12° 6' North latitude, a fortress fortified by the French engineer Ollivier [Olivier de Puymanel, a French follower of Nguyen Anh]; Kon-Koë [Hon Khoi, now Van Phong Bay] which Dayot considered an excellent port, the bays of Fu-yn [Phu Yen] and Quin-hone [Quy Nhon]; the island of Poulo-Canton, called by the natives Callao-Ray [Ly Son Island/Cu lao Ray]; Cham-Calao [Cu lao Cham], steep and barren. Finally, protected by the weather, the ship set sail into the bahía de Touranne [Da Nang Bay], a quiet and spacious cove, nestled

like a lake at the foot of high mountains that seemed to separate it from the sea..."

## CAPÍTULO XXVII.

COCHINCHINA.—TOURANNE.—HUE.

Habíamos hecho en Kandyu una considerable provision de sabrosos frutos que abundan mucho en el país. Por algunos pesos, Norberg acababa de obtener muchas cestas de naranjas, bananas, manzanas y enormes canastas henchidas de pescados de todo género. Abastecidos y refrescados, nos hicimos á la vela el propio día. La brisa era vigorosa y favorable, y protejió nuestro derrotero. Costeamos á alguna distancia la orilla montañosa que corria del N. E. al S. O.; pasamos el canal entre la isla de Cow y el escollo de Brito, que lleva el nombre del navegante portugués que se perdió en él, y montamos el cabo Pandaran, no menos borrascoso que el cabo de Buena Esperanza, con el auxilio de las olas que retumbaban en su alrededor. Este cabo forma en efecto una especie de recodo en el mar de China, y cuando lo hubimos pasado, cambiámos el rumbo dejándonos llevar de lleno hácia el N. A medida que íbamos avanzando en el canal que se prolonga entre la costa cochinchina y los isletes conocidos bajo el nombre de Paracel, la brisa del S. O., amortiguada por los elevados cúspides del continente, solo nos llegaba con desiguales soplos: ora sumida en aquellas gargantas, salía de ellas dirigiéndose hácia el N. O., ora siguiendo la ribera, pasaba casi al S. E. despues de haber hecho la vuelta del compas. En medio de estas incesantes variaciones, pudimos reconocer cómodamente aquella tierra que se estendia en direccion paralela al buque, tierra alta y dentellada, que deja prever numerosas abras en sus profundas recortadas; tierra bien observada por el oficial de marina Dayot, Francés de nacimiento y muerto mandarin del último rey de Cochinchina. De esta suerte pasó el junco sucesivamente ante la bahía de Ya-Trang situada á los 12° 6' lat. N., plaza que fortificó el ingeniero francés Ollivier; reconoció Kon-Koë que Dayot da por un abra excelente, los surji-

dores de Fu-yn y de Quin-hone, la isla de Poulo-Canton, llamada por los naturales Callao-Ray; las de Cham-Calao, escarpadas y estériles; por fin, protegido por el tiempo entró á todas velas en la bahía de Touranne, ensenada tranquila y espaciosa, encajada como un lago al pie de altas montañas que parecen aislarla del mar. Nuestro capitan chino fondeó en

*Excerpt from description of islands, reefs and the Paracel/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago on the coast of Cochinchina/Dang Trong in a Spanish publication published in Barcelona in 1841: Dumont d'Urville (Jules Sébastien César), op. cit., p. 222.*

### In lieu of a conclusion

The publications published in the Kingdom of Spain during the reign of King Thieu Tri in Dai Nam/Vietnam mentioned in this article not only paint a panoramic picture of the geography of the An Nam Empire both on the mainland and at sea, with

islands and reefs located within the empire's territory; but also emphasize the event of the An Nam emperor officially taking possession of the Paracelos/Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago since 1816. In particular, the publication affirms that there was no dispute from neighboring countries through the act of declaring possession of this archipelago by the emperor who opened the Nguyen Dynasty. These are valuable international historical evidences in recognizing the sovereignty of the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos that have belonged to Vietnam since ancient times.

## REFERENCES

1. Dumont d' Urville (Jules Sébastien César). 1841. *Viajepintoresco al rededor del mundo*, Segunda Edición, Tomo I. Barcelona: Imprenta y Librería de Juan Oliveres.
2. Orbigny (Alcide Dessalines de), Eyriès (Jean Baptiste Benoît). 1842. *Viajepintoresco á las dos Américas, Asia y África*, Tomo III. Barcelona: Imprenta y Librería de Juan Oliveres.

\*\*\*\*\*