

Maritime Archaeology in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai Provinces

Bui Van Liem*, Bui Van Hieu**

Abstract: The potential of underwater archaeology in particular and maritime archaeology in general in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai are extremely significant. The system of rivers, canals and arroyos in these two provinces is fairly dense; along the coast, there are many seaports and bays, which are favorable for ships and boats to travel. They also lie in the trade route on sea in the regions with famous seaports in history. They include sufficiently the main types of relics and research objects for maritime archaeology such as ancient trade ports, sunken ships, workshops for making ships and boats, and also the fishermen's communities with their development history throughout thousand of years. However, the maritime archaeology in this area has not developed on par with its potential and it is even under the threat of damage. Therefore, the systematic research into underwater or flooded sites and the relationships between them and the inland sites in these regions in the larger space and time is a vital task to set up a base for possible plans of protection, conservation of and bringing into full play their values.

Key words: Maritime archaeology; underwater archaeology; shipwrecks; Quang Nam; Quang Ngai.

1. Introduction

1.1. History has demonstrated that natural resources play a significant role in human life. Changes in history, to some degree, were consequences of the interaction between humans and those resources. Water resources comprising fresh water and salty water are among a variety of the natural resources that are crucial to humans. Thus, it will come as no surprise for us to learn that the residential locations and great civilizations of humankind are usually distributed near water and big rivers.

Recorded in history were also sea level rises and earthquakes occurring in many places at different times that submerged many human residential areas. Additionally, it can be said

that prior to the industrial age, transport by waterways was easier than that by road. As a result, the trade routes connecting ancient civilizations came into being along rivers and coasts. Cultural objects found on the coastal and riverine areas and even in a farther distance in combination with the historic documents have contributed to a better understanding of the economic, political and social issues as well as the cultural contacts through the sea trade networks in the past. Simultaneously, a large quantity of archaeological records associated with human

* Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., Institute of Archaeology.

** MA. Institute of Archaeology.

activities are increasingly discovered under water and in the submerged areas.

1.2. Vietnam is located in the center of Southeast Asia, “at the crossroads of the dwelling places of various ethnic groups and civilizations”, possessing a 3,260 km-long coastline and a system of thick rivers and lakes on land. Such a favorable condition of the natural environment and the information recently revealed from the historic and underwater archaeological records have enriched and diversified the understanding of the interaction among ancient residential communities on Vietnam’s territory. It can be said that the underwater archaeology in particular and the maritime archaeology of Vietnam in general contain significant potential. Nonetheless, virtually all their invaluable records have not been properly exploited. Up to now, there have been some preliminary ethnological, archaeological and anthropological studies of different ship types, ancient trading ports, marine fishing communities and several shipwrecks found and excavated in Hon Cau, Hon Dam, Cu Lao Cham, Ca Mau, Quang Ngai and so on [1], [2, pp.77-84], [3, pp.574-576], [4], [5], [6, pp.671-673], [8, pp. 62-73], [9, pp.129-130], [10, pp.271-272], [11, pp.9-10], [12], [13, pp.418-420], [14, pp.784-786], [16, pp. 327-329], [28, pp.548-552]. Systematic studies have yet to be undertaken in an attempt to ascertain which ones would be targeted particularly along the Vietnamese coast. Moreover, it cannot be said that the underwater archaeology and maritime archaeology have been really established in Vietnam in terms of theory, methodology and research staff. There is yet to be a unit specialized in studying the marine archaeology in Vietnam with the true meaning of that. The

formation and becoming officially operational of the Division of the Underwater Archaeology of the Institute of Archaeology, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, in June 2013 was viewed by the international colleagues as an important stride of Vietnam’s archaeological sector in the field of underwater heritage studies.

1.3. The underwater archaeology in particular and the maritime archaeology in general in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai have great potential. These two provinces are home to a dense system of rivers including such big ones as Vu Gia, Thu Bon, Tam Ky, Truong Giang, Tra Bong, Tra Khuc, Ve and Tra Cau; as well as the marine gates and areas favorable for ships to come in and out such as Cua Dai (Quang Nam), Sa Can, Sa Ky, Cua Lo, My A and Sa Huynh (Quang Ngai). These two provinces also lie in the maritime commercial routes of the region with the famous seaports in history like Hoi An (Quang Nam) and Thu Xa (Quang Ngai). The discovery and excavation of the shipwrecks in Cu Lao Cham (Quang Nam) and Binh Chau (Quang Ngai) serve as clear evidence of the once busy activities of the marine trade here. A large quantity of the vestiges of the cultural exchange with the Eastern and Southern Asian civilizations and, even farther, with the Western ones on the marine trade routes through Southeast Asia in the pre- and proto-history, have also been observed along the coasts of these provinces.

1.4. As a result from the awareness of the significance of the marine cultural heritage in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai to the studies of the nautical history, ceramic history, commercial relationship and the role of the international seaports in the country, there have so far been some papers

and studies on the types of this cultural heritage from varying angles and aspects, however, there is not yet one summarising the issue. This paper presents general remarks on the potential of the maritime archaeology in the two provinces.

2. Some types of maritime archaeological sites in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai

A viewpoint recently agreed by many researchers is that the subject which the maritime archaeology targets is more extended than that of the underwater archaeology. Not all maritime archaeological sites are underwater. A number of sites distributed in the areas between land and water provide information on the past human society such as works serving the purposes of people's travel (bridges and roads) or natural resource exploitation (dams, fish-traps and so on), the sites relating to the shipping (early seaports), the areas previously used to build and repair vessels and so on, that all are the research subjects of the maritime archaeology [21], [22], [23], [26].

The division of various types of the maritime archaeological sites needs a flexible understanding. If a shipwreck is considered an example of a site type of the maritime archaeology, then it contains in itself differential types of smaller-sized sites depending on dates, structures and conservation status.

With such points of view, it can be said that despite the abundance in the quantity and the diversity in the types of the maritime archaeological sites in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, they can be fundamentally divided into three main categories as follows:

2.1. Trading ports

As having mentioned above, the coasts of these provinces possess sea-ports and waters favourable for boats to come in and out, thus these two provinces also pertain to the maritime trading routes of the region with famous trading ports in history like Hoi An (Quang Nam) and Thu Xa (Quang Ngai).

2.1.1. The trading port of Hoi An

Located in an important position of the trade triangle between Japan, China and Southeast Asia, Hoi An at the outset played a crucial part in the international exchange. Research results indicate that the place had a relatively close exchange with the North of Vietnam and the South of China since the last centuries BC and first centuries AD. Furthermore, during the reign of Champa Kings, Hoi An was also a place for East-West commercial exchanges, the trading centre of which might be at the estuary of Thu Bon river. From the late 16th century to the 18th century, together with the reclamation of the Southern land by the Nguyen clan and the penetration into the Asian market by European merchants and Japanese traders with the arrival of the ship named Chau An, Hoi An became a famous international port on the East - West commercial route in the 16th - 17th centuries. Almost all the foreign trading activities over an extended area of Southern Central Vietnam during the time occurred there. A Japanese researcher wrote "Goods which were produced in the districts of Thang Hoa, Dien Ban, Quang Ngai, Quy Nhon, Binh Khang and Nha Trang were gathered in Hoi An streets by waterway, land, boats and horses"[15], [17, pp.35-51], [18, pp.171-172], [19, pp.445-450], [24], [27].

Over the years 2014 – 2015, the Institute of Archaeology in coordination with the Van Don – Bach Dang research group conducted an underwater archaeological survey in Cu Lao Cham and Hoi An and achieved a number of good results. At the depth of approximately 10 metres on the Nang ground of Lao islet, the research team discovered part of an anchor dating back to the 12th – 13th centuries (Photo 1). At the depth of 2-3m north of the ground of Ong, a number of pottery sherds dating back to the 16th -17th centuries were seen (Photo 2).

2.1.2. The trading port of Thu Xa

In Quang Ngai, in addition to the domestic trade, the foreign trade via Hoi An port also flourished. At the end of the 16th century and in early 17th century, merchant ships of Minh Huong people (those originating from China, fleeing the regime of Qing dynasty that came from Manchuria to rule China, having defeated the Ming dynasty; “Minh” is the Vietnamese pronunciation of “Ming”) came to Co Luy - Thu Xa to do their business.

The trading port of Thu Xa was situated in the downstream area, which had previously belonged to the canton of Nghia Ha, Chuong Nghia district, Tu Nghia county, Quang Nghia province in Nguyen dynasty, and now Nghia Hoa commune, Tu Nghia district, Quang Ngai province. The downstream area of Ve river is popularly called Vuc Hong river, one flow of which runs to the sea via Cua Lo and the other goes northwards into Phu Tho river, then goes to the sea via Cua Dai. As the sand dunes serve as a fence in the east, vessels anchored along the lower reaches of Ve river via Cua Dai were protected from the windstorm season. From the trading port of Thu Xa, merchant ships could go to Cua Dai

and Cua Lo in a short distance and move farther inland along two big rivers, Ve river and Tra Khuc river.

In the beginning of the 20th century, merchant ships from Japan, China and France came to Co Luy - Thu Xa to sell clothes, oil and household items and buy sugar, cinnamon, salt, dried areca-nuts and honey.

The trading port of Thu Xa was once as a place for the export of agricultural and forestry products and craft village items to Quang Ngai area via Minh Huong people as the intermediaries. There, the Minh Huong people built Ong pagoda, Ba pagoda and a clubhouse of four groups of people originating from Chinese provinces of Chaozhou, Fujian, Hainan and Guangdong. The site of Ong pagoda is still observed until today.

Thanks to favorable conditions for the export and trade of sugar, cinnamon and handicrafts to other areas via Thu Xa, such plants as sugar canes and cinnamon and craft villages had opportunities for development. During a phase in history, the ancient trading port of Thu Xa played an important role in developing the economy and culture of Quang Ngai.

The system of ancient trading ports in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai already attracted attention of researchers long time ago. However, there has up to now been not yet any monograph on this issue, and there has neither been any research in a larger spatial and temporal approach on the maritime history. Under the current national and international circumstances, a lot of issues posed need to be resolved. Therefore, it necessitates a systematic study of sites and relics associated with the underwater archaeology and the nautical history in

these provinces with a view to defining and evaluating their potential and values.

2.2. *Shipwrecks*

Vestiges of three shipwrecks have so far been identified in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, two of which have been archaeologically excavated. In spite of certain limitations in each of the excavations, they have contributed with particularly significant values to the studies of ceramic roads that occurred many centuries ago on the East Sea.

2.2.1. The shipwreck of Chau Tan

In 2009, after a storm, local fishermen identified a remnant of a shipwreck in Binh Chau coast, Binh Son district, Quang Ngai province. Part of this boat was then collected by Mr. Lam Dzu Xenh. Despite great efforts made for storage and preservation, many components of the boat have broken due to lack of financial resources and equipment. Results from a cooperative study between the Institute of Archaeology and Japanese researchers showed that Chau Tan was the oldest shipwreck ever known in the waters of Vietnam. The boat is about 25m long and 9m wide, constructed with the traditional technique in Southeast Asia. Its planks were connected together by dowel-woods and strings (Photo 3). Artefacts gathered from the shipwreck of Chau Tan included ceramics, bronze items, ink slabs, books. Ceramics were most numerous, encompassing Viet Chau ceramics, celadon ceramics, Truong Sa ceramics, Trang Bach Dinh ceramics, three-colour ceramics, blue and white ceramics and Islam ceramics with bowls, plates, vases, cups and boxes (Photos 4 - 5). Some sherds were carved and written with Chinese, Arabian and Indian characters such as Chinese

characters “li hua hang” (立花杭), “he cha keng” (河茶坑) and “ban” (班). The bronze items included coins, mirrors and bowls. Some coins were with Chinese characters of Khai Nguyen Thong Bao. Some of the characters on the items are hardly to be read being too blurred. The artefacts from the shipwreck bear traits similar to those on the wreck of Belitung in Indonesia. Chau Tan is as a piece of evidence of the marine commercial relationship between China and Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East via the coast of Vietnam. Continuing a systematic study of this shipwreck might likely provide information on the role and position of the ancient residential communities and nations on Vietnam’s territory that took part in this marine trading route [25].

2.2.2. The shipwreck of Binh Chau

In June 2013, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Quang Ngai province in coordination with the Doan Anh Duong Co. Ltd., and experts conducted excavation of a shipwreck located about 200 m off the coastline of Binh Chau at the depth of 3.5 - 4m below the sea level. The excavation revealed the remnant of a boat of 20.5m in length, 5.6m width, divided into 13 holds with 12 bulkheads. The relics included 274 boxes of ceramics as goods onboard with various types of glazes such as brown, celadon, blue and white and green white dated in the 8th century. In addition to that were some metal items like bronze mirrors, bronze weights and boat nails. This is the 6th excavation of ancient ships in the waters of Vietnam. Some papers on them have been published [2, pp.77-84], [4].

2.2.3. The shipwreck of Cu Lao Cham

In 1997, the then Ministry of Culture and Information set up a board for excavating the ancient ship of Cu Lao Cham. The board comprised a number of domestic and foreign institutions such as the Vietnam Museum of History, Institute of Archaeology, the branch of the Vietnam Museum of History in Ho Chi Minh City, the Department of Culture and Information of Quang Nam province, the Museum of Quang Nam, the Board for Relics Management of Hoi An, the Centre for Underwater Archaeology of the Oxford University (the United Kingdom), the Vietnam Salvage Cartel, Saga-Horizon Company (Malaysia), the Border Guards of Quang Nam province and the Police of the province. The excavation was conducted in three years (1997-1999), exposing a ship lying in the east - west direction, tilting from north to south, 29.4 m long and 7.2 m wide, with 19 holds separated by tightly-joined bulkheads. The excavation yielded 240,000 artefacts, encompassing glazed potteries (Photos 6 - 7), stoneware, items made on metal, wood and stone, as well as human remains. The excavation and the studies of the Cu Lao Cham shipwreck introduced a very vivid proof to the studies of the international trading exchanges on Vietnam's waters in history. Especially, it demonstrated that in the 15th and 16th centuries, Vietnam continued its most active participation on "the silk road on the sea". At the end of the excavation, many researchers published their papers and discussions on various aspects of the shipwreck [4], [6], [7], [14], [16], [28].

Besides, during a survey in Tam Hai commune, Nui Thanh district, Quang Nam

province, we had a chance to look at some potteries, most of which were from the marine area nearby, roughly 200 - 500m off the coast and at 10 - 20m depth. The artefacts were mainly characterised by glazed potteries of Vietnam and China with bowls, plates and cups dating back from the 4th - 10th to the 17th - 18th centuries, most of which were rooted from Vietnam dating back to the 14th century (Photo 8 - 9). It was assumed that there are also other shipwrecks in this area.

2.3. *Shipyard and marine fishing communities*

In addition to the two site types mentioned above, in a regional context, since the early centuries AD, the ancient people of Viet and Champa living in the two provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai reached a high level of the boat-making technology, capability of shipping, conquering the sea and conducting marine trading activities. At present, there remain dockyards in Kim Bong (Hoi An, Quang Nam) (Photo 10), Nghia An, Nghia Phu (Quang Ngai), and the marine fishing communities in Cua Dai, Nui Thanh (Quang Nam), Sa Can, Binh Chau, Tinh Hoa, Sa Ky (Photo 11), Ba Lang An, Ly Son (Quang Ngai) and so on. Thus, there is abundance and diversity in the subjects of comparative ethnographical and anthropological studies in the region such as the vessels and marine fishing communities.

3. Conclusion

The underwater archaeology in particular and the maritime archaeology in general in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai have significant potential. The river system in these two provinces is comparatively dense. There are

estuaries and areas along the coast favorable for ships to come in and out, which also lie in the marine commercial route with famous seaports in history. Major types of relics/vestiges of maritime archaeology are all included here such as ancient seaports, shipwrecks, shipyards and marine fishing communities with a development history of thousands of years.

Nevertheless, the marine archaeology here has not developed commensurate with its inherent potential and is encountering major challenges. On the other hand, the people's livelihood and local economic development have been step-by-step negatively impacting these cultural heritage resources. Consequently, the systematic study of underwater archaeological vestiges, submerged sites and their historic association with those on land in this area in a larger spatial and temporal scale is particularly necessary in providing the scientific dossier toward a proposal of solutions for the protection, conservation and promotion of their values. In so doing, information on the past hidden in this area would be better revealed.

References

- [1] Nguyễn Đình Chiến (2002), *Tàu cổ Cà Mau*, Viện Bảo tàng Lịch sử Việt Nam.
- [2] Nguyễn Đình Chiến, Nguyễn Ái Dung (2015), “Kết quả giám định tiền đồng tìm được trong tàu cổ Bình Châu”, Tạp chí *Khảo cổ học*, số 3.
- [3] Nguyễn Đình Chiến, Nguyễn Quốc Hữu, Nguyễn Hữu Phương (2009), “Thông tin về tàu đắm cổ Rạch Tràm ở vùng biển Phú Quốc”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2008*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [4] Nguyễn Đình Chiến, Phạm Quốc Quân (2008), *Gốm sứ trong năm con tàu cổ ở vùng biển Việt Nam*.
- [5] Nguyễn Đình Chiến, Phạm Quốc Quân (2014), “Khai quật tàu đắm cổ Bình Châu, con tàu cổ thứ 6 trong vùng biển Việt Nam”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2013*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [6] Nguyễn Lâm Cường (2001), “Về những di cốt người tìm thấy trong cuộc khai quật tàu đắm ở Cù Lao Chàm (Quảng Nam)”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2000*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [7] Lê Thanh Hà (2001), “Nhóm đồ gốm sứ Trung Quốc trên con tàu cổ Cù Lao Chàm tàng trữ tại Bảo tàng Lịch sử Việt Nam”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2000*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [8] Nguyễn Quốc Hùng (1992), “Khai quật kho tàng cổ dưới đáy biển Hòn Cau (Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu)”, Tạp chí *Khảo cổ học*, số 3.
- [9] Nguyễn Quốc Hùng (1992), “Phát hiện con thuyền cổ thế kỷ XV bị chìm ở gần hòn đảo Vang (Phú Quốc - Kiên Giang)”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1991*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [10] Nguyễn Quốc Hùng (1993), “Phát hiện về chiếc tàu chìm năm 1992 tại Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu và Khánh Hòa”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1992*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [11] Nguyễn Quốc Hùng (1998), “Bảo vệ các di chỉ khảo cổ học trong thời kỳ công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1997*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.

- [12] Nguyễn Quốc Hùng (2005), “Hơn một thập kỷ khai quật khảo cổ học dưới nước ở Việt Nam”, *Một thế kỷ khảo cổ học Việt Nam*, tập 2, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [13] Phạm Quốc Quân (2002), “Thảo luận về niên đại đồ gốm phát hiện ở biển đảo Phú Quốc (Kiên Giang)”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2001*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [14] Tống Trung Tín, Ivovaxilite (2001), “Vài nét về đồ gốm mỏng trong tàu đắm cổ Cù Lao Chàm”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2000*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [15] Bùi Minh Trí, Phạm Quốc Quân (1994), “Gốm Hizen-Nhật Bản tìm thấy ở một số địa điểm khảo cổ học Việt Nam”, *Tạp chí Khảo cổ học*, số 4.
- [16] Trịnh Cao Tường (1995), “Báo cáo sơ bộ về tàu thuyền cổ bị đắm chìm trong vùng cửa biển Hội An, Quảng Nam - Đà Nẵng”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1994*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [17] Trịnh Cao Tường (1991), “Mở đầu và nghiên cứu thương cảng cổ Việt Nam trong lịch sử trên phương diện Khảo cổ học”, *Tạp chí Khảo cổ học*, số 4.
- [18] Trịnh Cao Tường (1992), “Nghiên cứu đô thị cổ Hội An, chặng đường 5 năm qua”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1991*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [19] Trịnh Cao Tường (1996), “Hội An, nơi hội tụ của nhiều dòng gốm”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 1995*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [20] Thạch Phương, Nguyễn Đình An (2010), *Địa chí Quảng Nam - Đà Nẵng*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội
- [21] Colin Renfrew, Paul Bahn (1994), *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practic*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, London.
- [22] Ian Shaw and Robert Jameson (Ed) (2002), *A Dictionary of Archaeology*, Blackwell Publishing House.
- [23] Keith Muckelroy (1978), *Maritime Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Li Tana (1999), *Xứ Đàng Trong - Lịch sử kinh tế xã hội Việt Nam thế kỷ XVII – XVIII*, Nxb Trẻ, Tp. Hồ Chí Minh.
- [25] Noriko Nishino, Toru Aoyama, Jun Kimura, Takenori Nogami and Le Thi Lien (2014), “Nishimura Project: The Oldest Shipwreck Found in Vietnam - Testimony to the Maritime Cerami Route”, *Khảo cổ học dưới nước Việt Nam và Đông Nam Á: Hợp tác để phát triển*, Quảng Ngãi.
- [26] Richard A. Gould (2000), *Archaeology and the social history of ships*, Cambridge University Press.
- [27] Kikuchi Seiichi (2010), *Nghiên cứu đô thị cổ Hội An từ quan điểm Khảo cổ học lịch sử*, Nxb Thế giới, Hà Nội.
- [28] Đoàn khai quật tàu đắm cổ Cù Lao Chàm (2001), “Khai quật tàu đắm cổ Cù Lao Chàm (1997-1999)”, *Những phát hiện mới về khảo cổ học năm 2000*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội.
- [29] Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Quảng Ngãi 2010, *Địa chí Quảng Ngãi*, Nxb Từ điển Bách khoa, Hà Nội.

Some illustrating images for Maritime Archaeology in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai



Photo 1. Parts of anchor in Bai Nang



Photo 2. Ceramics in Bai Ong



Photo 3



Photo 4

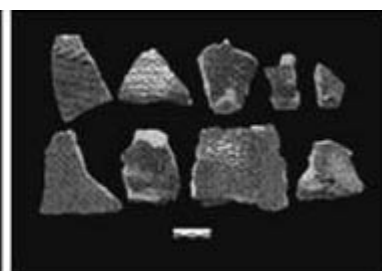


Photo 5



Photo 6 - 7. Ceramics on shipwreck in Cu Lao Cham

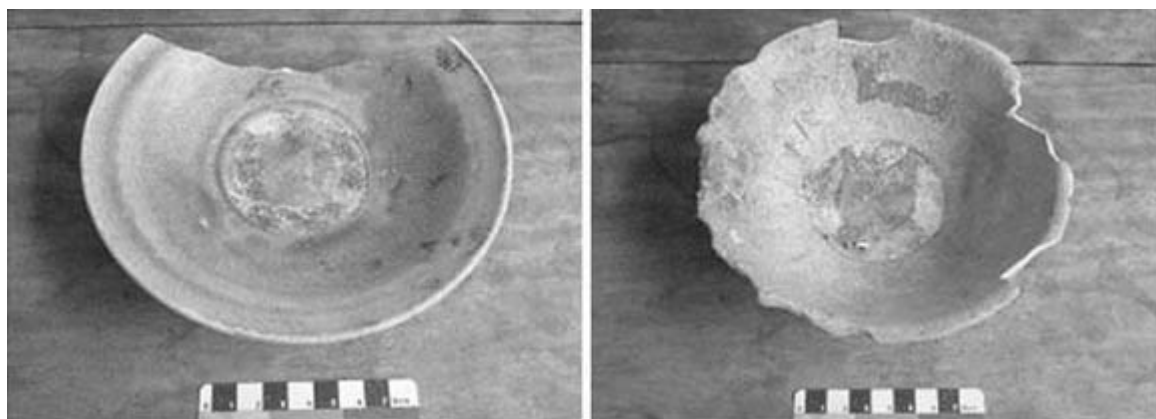


Photo 8 - 9. Ceramics in Tam Hai



Photo 10. Shipbuilding in Kim Boi, Hoi An



Photo 11. Sa Ky port, Quang Ngai