

Ceramics from Shipwrecks off Viet Nam

At the beginning of 2004, I joined a shipwreck survey team that included Michael Flecker, expert for the Company of Intercontinental Trading and Services (Australia) and staff of the Kien Giang Provincial Museum. We identified a sunken ship twenty-five meters long at a depth of thirty-five meters. It contained Thai elephant tusks and ceramics dating from the fifteenth through sixteenth centuries. Regrettably, its cargo had been looted; therefore, it was impossible to conduct an archaeological excavation.

In addition, we also identified another wreck site three kilometers east of the Hon Dam shipwreck, which had been excavated in 1991. There, our divers recovered a number of scattered Chinese and Thai ceramics dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but no hull remains were found. Thus, up to now, three wrecks have been discovered off the Kien Giang coast alone.

In the Vung Tau-Con Dao Sea, apart from the first wreck excavated in 1991, vestiges of a second one has recently been discovered by fishermen. Its cargo, eighteenth-century Chinese blue-and-white ceramics and white porcelain, has been partly recovered and is now preserved at the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Provincial Museum.

This is the latest information on three shipwrecks that have been identified off the coast of Viet Nam, but have not yet been excavated.

On the other hand, during 1990–2002, five fifteenth- to eighteenth-century shipwrecks were excavated off the Viet Nam coast. The five are: Cu Lao Cham, fifteenth century, excavated 1997–99; Binh Thuan, 1573–1620, excavated 2001–2; Hon Cau/Vung Tao, c. 1690, excavated 1990–92; Ca Mau, 1723–35, excavated 1998–99; and Kien Giang, fifteenth century, excavated 19901.

THE CU LAO CHAM SHIPWRECK (FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

From May 1997 to June 1999, the National Museum of Vietnamese History (NMVH), the Viet Nam Salvage Corporation (Visal), and Saga Horizons (a Malaysian salvage company) jointly investigated and excavated the wreck lying seventy to seventy-two meters deep off Cu Lao Cham Island, Hoi An, Quang Nam Province. Pham Quoc Quan, director of NMVH, and Lam Minh Chau, director of Visal, directed the excavation; Mensun Bound