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### CREATING A “MICRO-COLONY” WITHIN A PROTECTORATE: THE EXAMPLE OF THE FRENCH CONCESSION OF TOURANE (ĐÀ NẴNG), 1884–1889

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**Abstract.** Although history ultimately favored the portuary development of *Sài Gòn* and *Hải Phòng*, it was Tourane (*Đà Nẵng*) that was the initial target of French colonial ambitions in the Indochinese peninsula. For over a century (1740–1858), its bay and territory had been the scene and the epicenter of Franco-British overseas imperial rivalries, a fact which actively fostered an entire set of colonial images about the site, which was quite often referred to as potential base to serve the interests of commerce and the Navy. Despite these ambitions nurtured over a long period, it was only after the conquest of Tonkin, thirty years after the Cochinchina expedition, that its territory was finally established as a concession: on 3 October 1888, the French were finally seizing juridical control of Tourane.

As a conceded territory, Tourane was essential to French colonial and imperial designs. The focal point of political and economic ambitions, it was both a gateway and a means to prepare and support the French colonial project in Indochina. A hybrid and previously unknown template, the conceded territory model designed for, and from, Tourane indeed allowed the French to implement new strategies to tighten colonial rule in Indochina.

Offering an unprecedented analysis on the creation of the French concession of Tourane at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this research examines the political context during which it was conceived, the work and conclusions given by the commission in charge of studying its borders and jurisdiction, and the steps taken by the colonial administration in order to seize definitive control of a strategic territory inside what was then left of the *Đại Nam* Kingdom. All in all, comparing Tourane with others treaty ports, it shows how and why its territory stood out as a “micro-colony” in a protectorate territory (Annam-Tonkin).

**Keywords:** Southeast Asia, French Indochina, Vietnam, Annam-Tonkin, Tourane, Đà Nẵng, Indochinese ports, open ports, treaty ports, concession, colonization.

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## Introduction

While the history of East Asian treaty ports continues to attract sustained scientific attention [Bickers, Jackson 2018],<sup>1</sup> no specialized study has yet come forth on the port city-concessions of Vietnam under colonial rule. Similarly, despite its importance in colonial and contemporary Vietnam, the port city of *Đà Nẵng* (formerly Tourane) remains one of the main blind spots in the historiography on French Indochina.<sup>2</sup> It has been overlooked in the history of concessions and port cities in the Far East, as well as in the history of French colonial harbours<sup>3</sup>.

This paper aims to begin filling what amounts to a genuine historiographic black hole, as it contributes to advance the knowledge of the juridical, economic, maritime and harbour situation of Indochina at the time of the unequal treaties. Using archives gathered in France and Vietnam and applying a doubly comparative approach — on the one hand with the other territorial concessions wrested from the Vietnamese Imperial Court between 1874–1888; on the other, with the Chinese treaty ports —, it will focus on the cession of Tourane to the French in the late 1880s.

Despite their particularities, the mechanisms behind it clearly evokes the strategy deployed first in India by the Great Chartered Companies, then in the Straits Settlements, finally in China through the two Opium Wars.<sup>4</sup> As the outcome of a policy favoring the establishment of informal territorial control, the cession of Tourane should be understood within a larger movement: that of the expansion of the great Western powers and race to open new markets in the Far East.

Showing that the French concession of Tourane was conceived as a genuine “micro-colony” in the protectorate of Annam-Tonkin, this study attempts to answer the following question: why and how did Tourane, a port opened to the South China Sea (*Biển Đông*), permitted the introduction of a new form of colonial rule inside the Indochinese Union?

### Tourane and the conquest of Indochina: a strategic concession?

On 6 June 1884, the signing of the Patenôtre Treaty, elaborated from the Harmand Treaty (25 Aug. 1883), consecrated the recognition of the French Protectorate over Annam-Tonkin, a new and key stage in the constitution of French Indochina. The ports of Tourane, *Quy Nhơn* and *Xuân Đài* were open to international trade, and conferences were to be held, following ratification of the treaty, to settle “the boundaries of the open ports and French concessions in each of these ports” (art. 18).

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<sup>1</sup> See also “Treaty Port China in World History 1842–1930”. Postgraduate Online Workshop organized by the University of Portsmouth’s ‘Port Towns and Urban Cultures’ group (July 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Except for two books published by Vietnamese historians (see bibliography). However, these publications are incomplete in many ways, especially about the colonial era. Their authors adopt an event-based and monographic approach that substantially limit their point of view and conclusions.

<sup>3</sup> About the importance of Tourane during the precolonial period, see: Le Galloudec S. (2019). *La mer de Chine méridionale (mer de l’Est), terrain des rivalités impériales ultramarines franco-britanniques: le cas de Tourane (1740–1858)*. *Journées du GIS HSM, MRSH de Caen*, 27 Nov. (to be published in 2022 in *Revue d’Histoire maritime*). We should also note that the the Nguyễn emperors (Gia Long and Minh Mạng in particular) were fully aware of European intentions in the region and well understood the strategic importance of Tourane, which they fortified and used to limit and better control the arrival of Westerners on their territory [Đại Nam thực lục (ĐNTL): years 1826, 1829, 1847, 1856–58].

<sup>4</sup> On the first signs of the concession system and its shift from the East Indies to the Far East, see: Klein J.-F. (2009). *Une thalassocratie asiatique britannique?* In: D. Barjot, C.-F. Mathis (eds.). *Le monde britannique: 1815–1931*. Paris: A. Colin, 130–141.

On 20 Dec.1884, Gabriel Lemaire, Resident-General in Annam-Tonkin (RGAT), instituted a special Commission to that effect. In his instructions to Édouard Navelle, the Commission's president, he asked its members to determine the conditions under which the future French establishments could develop [ANOM, FM, SG Indo, AF, 107, F 20. Lemaire to Navelle, 14 Feb. 1885]. The purpose was to gather information about customs surveillance, security and health standards of each site, as well as on the facilities available for navigation and trade. They were also advised to consider the opinion and feelings of the local scholar officials and populations as to the future French presence. One of the main goals was to prepare the ground for the establishment of a limited colonial juridical framework within the protectorate. No longer relying on the narratives of missionaries, seamen, naval officers or traders, as had been the practice in the past [Le Galloudec 2019], the point now was to draw up a complete and reliable report on the local situation, to be forwarded to the Minister of the Navy and Colonies (MNC). The report was handed over on 22 Mar. 1885, after three months of inquiry [Ibid., Rapport de la commission, 22 Mar. 1885; ANOM, GGI, série F, file 5989]: things had to move at a brisk pace.

Indeed, the establishment of the protectorate was conducted in the same spirit that prevailed in Cochinchina when it was conquered in the 1860s: to gain a firm hold on the country, one had to erode little by little the Vietnamese imperial authority. For most of the men entrusted with its implementation, its conception was an “unfinished solution”, to be applied temporarily until the introduction of a direct administration; the colony of Cochinchina had to serve as a “model” for the whole of *Đại Nam* [Fourniau 2002: 361–362].

But very soon a conflict erupted between the military and civilian authorities over the management and future of the protectorate. The former, knowing the weaknesses of the Court – affected by a dynastic crisis since the death of Tự Đức –, hoped “to get rid of the ruling dynasty or, at least, to weaken it to such an extent that the Confucian framework of the state would be broken” [Ibid.]. All things considered, it meant a complete overhaul of colonial domination in Annam-Tonkin. By contrast, on the civilian side, no one was seeking to go beyond what had been established.

This antagonism, at first symbolized by the Bouet vs. Harmand opposition, continued between General Brière de Lisle – in charge of the Franco-Chinese war and the “pacification of Tonkin” – and Lemaire, who had set up the Navelle Commission. And as it were, the latter was composed mainly of military officers (from both the Navy and Army)<sup>5</sup>: speaking rights therefore tended to favor the military and commercial interests, precisely at the time that the military administration and French business circles concentrated all their efforts on the definitive acquisition of Tonkin.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the Commission report tended to reflect the aspirations to place what was left of the *Đại Nam* Kingdom under definitive trusteeship. Moreover, when Lemaire addressed its report to the MNC, he did not fail to express his reservations about the annexationist intentions it contained, commenting that the aim of the French government was “to concentrate the flow of exchanges” in the open ports of Annam, and “not at all to annex to our possessions, under some form of ambiguous domination, any part of the Annamite territory” [ANOM, FM, SG (Indo), AF, 107, F 20. Lemaire to MNC, 10 Apr. 1885].

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<sup>5</sup> Mentioned are: Navelle, president and reporter; Hennique, captain of the *Lionne*; Bruneau, artillery captain; Nolle, medical officer of the *Lionne*, and Larosière, chief of the Customs Office.

<sup>6</sup> The point was to overcome the failure of the Saigonese project which aimed to give France a decisive support base on the shores of the “Asian Mediterranean” [Gipouloux 2011]. The myth of Yunnan, revived by Francis Garnier and Jean Dupuis, had shifted attention and ambitions towards Tonkin, the Red River and *Hải Phòng*.

Nevertheless, everything converged in that direction. On 14 Apr. 1885, shortly after the fall of Jules Ferry, the Brisson government appointed the count of Courcy new commander-in-chief and RGAT. Lemaire was dismissed while all power was placed in the hands of a military officer. Less than three months later, the new appointee issued an order to his troops to attack the *Huế* citadel (5 July 1885). This sudden use of force against the Court, the outcome of which ended any kind of autonomy of the Nguyễn dynasty authority, testifies to the weight acquired by the “annexationists” from the “Hanoi clan” [Fourniau 2002: 363]. Moreover, beyond the ambitions of the military, the event followed the treaty of Tianjin (9 June 1885) which sealed Franco-Chinese peace and the international recognition of French domination on the north of *Đài Nam*.<sup>7</sup>

Given the context, the recommendations of the Navelle Commission do not seem to have been adventuresome. The report was submitted only four months before the seizure of *Huế*. Had the assault been prepared to approve the measures recommended by the Commission? Was the French concession of Tourane to serve as a strategic base in case the country became destabilized? Both hypotheses are tempting. All in all, it looks like the demarcation of the Tourane concession was part of the more general desire to take definitive possession of *Đài Nam*.<sup>8</sup> However, the urge to impose direct administration was not realized in either Annam or Tonkin. The status of protectorate remained the actual juridical form of domination, which contributed to make more complex the “Indochinese system” [Gojosso 2016].

The whole interest of the territorial concessions wrested in 1884 seems to lay in providing a location where French territorial, administrative and political structures could be secured firmly. As Lemaire himself said, the Patenôtre Treaty did not create a clear distinction between the boundaries of the area allocated to open ports and those where concessions would be established. The possibility of drawing a real political and economic advantage from this situation was discussed. As the structures to be built there were to be lasting and progressive, security would also be enforced against “the internal as well as the external enemy” [ANOM, FM, SG (Indo), AF, 107, F 20. Lemaire to MNC, 10 Apr. 1885].

The Tourane concession, as it was imagined by the Commission, thus encompassed a twofold purpose: providing a base for retreat in case of attacks, since it was planned to maintain military positions there; and a commercial port open to East Asia, the result of ambitions nurtured in the past [Le Galloudec 2019] but reactivated by French ambitions against Siam in the mountainous hinterland of the Indochinese midriff. The point was no longer to be satisfied with the mere opening of its port to commerce, as announced, among others, in the treaty of 1862, but also to root French authority and administration in a lasting fashion and to attract metropolitan capital there. The territorial clauses of the previous treaties too, confirm that the French had very precise objectives as to the territory; objectives that pertained to colonial, or even imperial, geostrategic motivations.

As it were, the signing of the Harmand Treaty occurred at the moment when Franco-Chinese antagonisms reached their apex, when the Nguyễn dynasty was in the midst of a succession crisis, and when French positions in Tonkin seemed precarious. By obtaining the cession of a part of the Tourane territory within the overall protectorate they were trying to impose on *Huế*, the French hoped to gain an alternative solution to which they could retreat in case Tonkin was lost. From this new base located near the imperial capital, they would be able both to maintain on-going pressure on *Huế* and to reconstitute their armed forces to launch a counter-offensive. Moreover, from the legal

<sup>7</sup> The conquest was definitively recognized on 24 Dec. 1885.

<sup>8</sup> Or at least impose a stricter form of trusteeship.

standpoint, particularly in the eyes of traders and industrialists, this new mode of management would provide better returns.

Nevertheless, nothing was ratified in 1883: Paris wished to avoid a direct war with China, which the establishment of such a political regime would not have failed to provoke.<sup>9</sup> But the conflict proved unavoidable. Fortunately for French interests, it led to a peace based on the Li-Fournier Convention, then on the Patenôtre Treaty. Circumstances came to favor France quite markedly, and it chose to keep the same document which it had imposed in 1883. The territorial clauses were similar, but the context very different: the protectorate over Annam-Tonkin had been established officially, and the French now enjoyed considerable means to develop their trade with China.

While the territorial concessions inside the open ports of Annam were seen, somewhat fancifully, as the key to a broad commercial expansion strategy, by contrast, on the ground, the situation was far from stabilized: the military intervention in Hue had negative consequences. Beginning in July 1885, Annam became the scene of a frontal clash that pitted the vast *Cần Vương* national uprising against the colonial regime intent on setting up its structures. As the war extended to the Tonkin delta, the protectorate found itself in a dead end, and discontent over Indochina reached a new high point [Fourniau 2002: 404–424]. In 1886 [Ngô Văn Minh 2007: 95–102] and 1887 [EPCC French Lines & Cies, Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, Agency of Tourane, activity reports, 1887 (1997 002 4485)], insurrections even spread right to the gates of Tourane. The project of transforming its territory into a French concession, in line with the annexationist goals of the military, almost instantly ran up against the political instability pervading Annam and postponed the aspirations expressed by the Commission. Ultimately, the effective consolidation of the Touranese colonial project required a certain degree of political stability.

For many, the Indochinese colonial domain appeared as a true administrative absurdity. The heterogeneity of the statuses<sup>10</sup> could no longer be sustained, and important changes were necessary to rationalize the colonial undertaking. In Oct. 1887, with the birth of the Indochinese Union, a remedy was finally discovered. A government of Indochina would henceforth insure political unity by acting on all Indochinese territories under French rule, each nevertheless preserving its own form of autonomy [Gojosso 2016].

In a way, the Union was mainly the result of the victory of the annexationist perspectives: while the regime of the protectorate was preserved within its framework, it was now a mere “administrative formula”. Thus, this new political unity inaugurated the final consolidation of the Touranese colonial project launched in 1885, which aimed precisely to establish a new concessionary system that favored French domination. Clearly the new situation could only be favorable to a renewed interest in the main port of Annam.

In June 1888, in his first report as Governor General (GG), Richaud appeared particularly dissatisfied with the situation created by the Patenôtre Treaty in Annam: he felt that the French had not secured sufficient rights there, unlike in Tonkin, and that major concessions could therefore be extracted from *Huế* [ANOM, FM, SG (Indo), FM, SG (Indo), AF, A 30. Report of Richaud, 10 June 1888]. These would enable France to establish the supremacy it sought so keenly, by dominating the political capital of *Đại Nam* from up close. The policy pursued by Richaud therefore clearly stood in

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<sup>9</sup> The protectorate was intended to directly challenge the survival of the system of subjection of the *Đại Nam* Kingdom to Peking.

<sup>10</sup> Indochina was then made of the colony of Cochinchina, of the protectorates of Cambodia and Annam-Tonkin, and there already existed port-concessions (in the protectorates) that were placed under colonial law.

line with that of the Navelle Commission, as well as of Courcy and the “Hanoi clan”. Richaud viewed Tourane as a base point of major importance, both for regional economic development and for strategic objectives [Ibid. Report of 18 Oct. 1888].

In late Sept. 1888, he made his way to *Huế* [Voyage à Hué 1888: 1]. His goal was to take advantage of the relative stability of the region and of the devotion of *Đông Khánh* to the French to negotiate a new convention. In exchange for satisfying the latter’s requests, Richaud was able to obtain two royal ordinances. The first, dated 1 Oct. 1888, was designed to put into practice art. 18 of the 1884 treaty, which represented a major advance for France: “*Hà Nội*, *Hải Phòng* and *Tourane* [were] elevated to the status of French concessions and ceded in full ownership to the French government” [Ibid., 10–11]. The ordinance was implemented two days later: on 3 Oct. 1888, the French concession of *Tourane* was officially born. Richaud’s move was putting an end to nearly a century and a half of ambitions and unsuccessful attempts to take over this territory [Le Galloudec 2019]. At the same time, it opened a new cycle of hopes of all kinds, turning *Tourane* into a new colonial utopia [Le Galloudec 2018].

Conceded at a key moment of the acquisition and “pacification” of Tonkin, *Tourane* must have held a definite strategic dimension in the eyes of French administrators and business interests rooted/involved in Indochina, or dreaming of opening the large hinterland explored by the *Pavie* mission. This would suffice to explain the desire to erect a hybrid concessionary system from it, at once taking the procedures in effect in most Chinese treaty ports as its model [Bickers, Jackson 2018] and in opposition to the measures previously adopted in the concessions obtained in 1874.

### **The Touranese concession, a new colonial system?**

In its report, the Commission focused on *Tourane* and *Xuân Đài*, rather than *Qui Nhon*, *Hải Phòng* and *Hà Nội*, French concessions since 1874. It insisted markedly on this point, as it was out of question to repeat the “errors” of the previous decade. It was necessary to break out of the narrow territories that had become intolerable and unsuitable for French designs. The future concessions were to allow an effective territorial and political takeover inside the protectorate [ANOM, FM, SG (Indo), AF, 107, F 20. Rapport de la commission], a requirement the context of 1884–1885 was now putting within reach.

In 1874, as the circumstances did not allow, their area amounted to only five *mẫu* ( $\approx 2.5$  ha), which was far from enough to establish the territorial control that had been expected. Dissatisfied with a situation that hampered the management and extension of political and commercial undertakings, the consuls had renegotiated their boundaries upwards, particularly in *Hà Nội* and *Hải Phòng*. Nevertheless, if the French had succeeded in establishing themselves and slightly improving the perimeter of their concessions, their situation remained precarious [Raffi 1994; Papin 2001].

A decade later, Paris had adopted a subtly orchestrated tactic: the juridical foundations of the new concessions voluntarily remained somewhat vague, stating only that “subsequent conferences” would settle “the limits of the open ports and French concessions in each of these ports”; a clause which led to create the *Navelle Commission*.

Now that *Tourane* and *Xuân Đài* offered new opportunities for taking root inside the protectorate, a reinterpretation of the status usually attributed to a conceded territory emerged. The concession was no longer to be limited to a mere parcel of land. It would have to be vast enough for the authority to which it was granted to make it into an autonomous site, ruled by a set of laws different

from those of the “protected” kingdom from which it was subtracted [ANOM, SG (Indo), AF, 107, F 20. Rapport de la commission].

The Commission thereby attempted to demonstrate the benefits that the protectorate could bring to the administration and economic development of the country, and even to the well-being of its population. Briefly stated, the appropriation of territory was justified with scarcely veiled colonist arguments. France’s aid and protection could not be guaranteed, reach its goal and provide good results if *Huế* refused to grant it these concessions in good conditions; that is, by implementing a local transfer of power. A new concession system was to be adopted, enhancing the definitive placement of *Đai Nam* under French tutelage, which amounted to implement the annexationist goals of the “Hanoi clan”.

Following that purpose, the boundaries of the Tourane concession were to be “Frenchified” on “all the territory encompassing the boundaries of the open port” [Ibid.]. That explains its considerable surface (fig. 1, 2, 3). As to the rights of the occupiers, the Commission wished that French authority should take over on those the Emperor had initially granted. Tourane would become a vast autonomous zone, placed in the hands of the colonial authorities. In other words, the idea was to obtain a kind of colonial enclave inside the protectorate, a miniature Cochinchina. And since they were to be established inside open ports, one had to foresee their commercial and economic development, again in contrast with the form and aims of the concessions obtained in 1874. In that way, the Commission hoped that Tourane and *Xuân Đai* were to become the main commercial centers of Annam, placed under the protection of the French [Ibid. Lemaire to MMC].

Tourane therefore was intended to serve the interests of French business circles whose establishment was to be not only facilitated but optimized. As we know, behind political decisions stood genuine pressure groups that enacted and carried the different stages of the conquest. Clearly, the members of the Commission were not absent from the process.

Ultimately, they proposed to delineate an area of about 8 km<sup>2</sup> (800 ha) in *Xuân Đai*, and an “even much greater area” [Ibid.] in Tourane (fig. 1), including:

The mouth of the *sông Hàn* and its banks, “the only path for the commercial development of the port” [Ibid. Rapport de la commission].

The *Tiên Sa* peninsula, for security and strategic reasons rather than for a potential extension of the port and its infrastructures, as would be the case some years later [Le Galloudec 2018].

A broad surface that was at once capacious and usable, to the south and west, so that the French administration and authorities could set up without feeling constricted, to be followed by future settlers involved in small trade, commerce and plantations; and so that the center could grow without obstacles and the neighboring cultivated areas could be controlled by the French authorities.

The Marble Mountains, located southeast of Tourane.

A few hundred dwellings, for political reasons: the goal being to make possible “propaganda for our ideas and our influence” [Ibid. Lemaire to MNC]. This was linked to the Commission putting forward the idea that the Vietnamese already established on the conceded territories should be offered the possibility of becoming French through naturalization [Ibid. Rapport de la commission]. This may express a will to go beyond Frenchification of the land (which went against the Patenôtre Treaty but corresponded to the direction indicated by the “civilizing mission” propelled by the imperial Republic).



Fig. 1. Map of the French concession of Tourane drawn by the Navelle Commission, c. March 1885. ANOM, FM, SG (Indo), AF, 107, F 20 (2).

Responding to the will expressed by the Commission, Lemaire adopted a relatively ambiguous discourse: while he supported several of the conditions suggested for rooting French rule, he nevertheless was very critical about the proposed area for the concessions, particularly for Tourane, judging that they overstepped the framework of the regime instituted by the protectorate. He believed the role of France should be distributed over the entire kingdom and not concentrated on certain locations that would inevitably resemble, under such conditions, a territorial annexation. As for the expected commercial and industrial development, he asserted that it could only come about progressively. He proposed to the MNC to down scale the territorial aspirations advocated by the Commission, casting aside the proposal to include Tiên Sa peninsula, and expressing the wish that the southern and western limits be brought back to the limits of the dwellings at the mouth of the river. Answering the issue of extending the concession boundaries to accommodate future commercial, industrial and demographic growth, he put forward the possibility for those interested to buy land around the concession, when the need would arise. On this point, he took as a model the French concession in Shanghai [Ibid. Lemaire to MNC].

Nevertheless, neither the Commission's report nor Lemaire criticism seem to have been exposed after the ratification of the Patenôtre Treaty (3 Feb. 1886). It is certain that the conferences



mentioned therein never were organized, since the French and Vietnamese sources contain no trace of them.<sup>11</sup> However, the form of territorial appropriation planned in 1885 remained quite present in certain administrative documents [ANOM, GGI, F (03), 64202. Report from Hector, 29 Dec.1887].<sup>12</sup> Besides, two months before the negotiations undertaken by Richaud, the Resident of France in Tourane (RFT) noted the advantages of setting the boundaries of the French concession so as to include: the Tiên Sa peninsula, where a deep water port could be developed; the western part of the bay, up to the Hải Vân Pass, to secure permanent access to the capital; and the coastal territory leading to Faïfo (*Hội An*), where the construction of a rail road linking the city to the harbour for the transport of goods should be foreseen [ANOM, GGI, F, 5990. RFT to Superior Resident of Annam (SRA), 1 Aug. 1888].<sup>13</sup> Moreover, while he recognized the existence of a first attempt at demarcation, conducted by the Commission, he noted its full report had been lost, and that Richaud had expressed his opinion neither concerning the western part of the bay nor on the subject of the strip linking Tourane to Faïfo [Ibid.].

According to the Vietnamese historians [Ngô Văn Minh 2007: 104], in Oct. 1888, the concession was covering about 10,000 ha. However, these dimensions seem to be excessive, as shown by an official letter from Mahé, where the latter noted the French concession was then covering an area of 1,366 ha [ANOM, GGI, F, 5992. Note sur la concession française de Tourane, 23 Oct. 1895]. All in all, it had been significantly reduced compared to the initial aspirations of the Commission, even after the official demarcation of its borders between 20–23 March 1889 (fig. 2) [ANOM, GGI, F, 5990].<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the extent of the conceded territory remained significant, and a new map was drawn less than three month later (fig. 3). The limits of the French concession appear much wider there and almost correspond to those recommended by the Commission, which makes us think that its report was rediscovered.

Indeed, there are only two main differences between the plans of Mar. 1885 and June 1889: the latter does not encompass the Marble Mountains, but, contrary to the aspirations of 1885, it extended along all the western shores of the bay, precisely as advocated by Mahé. They were surely included for geostrategic reasons relating to maritime and terrestrial considerations, since its southern extension was limited by the mandarinal Road. Its corresponded mainly to a political and strategic reason: the whole interest for the French was to insure “whatever the weather and sea conditions, communication with the capital” [Ibid. RFT to SRA]. Tourane, a port open to international trade, sole French city of Annam, was thereby to provide a base for support or retreat of the French military. A solution conceived as the *Cần Vương* threatened the colonial presence all the way to the Tonkin delta.

<sup>11</sup> In the ĐNTL, only a few details are given about the cession of Tourane (vol. 9, p. 429).

<sup>12</sup> “We must establish ourselves firmly in the coastline ports which are our supply line and base of operations towards the interior. It is necessary to take a very large amount of land in these ports.”

<sup>13</sup> Tourane was under construction; the French were already considering the delimitation of military lands and the construction of public warehouses for the port [NAVN4, RSA, série H, file 2936].

<sup>14</sup> Contrary to what many Vietnamese authors wrote (except for [Nguyễn Quang Trung Tiến 2021]), the concession was not only established on the left side of the *sông Hàn*, but also on its right bank and on the western shores of the *Tiên Sa* peninsula, until the Observatory islet (*hòn Mồ Côi*) – see fig. 2.

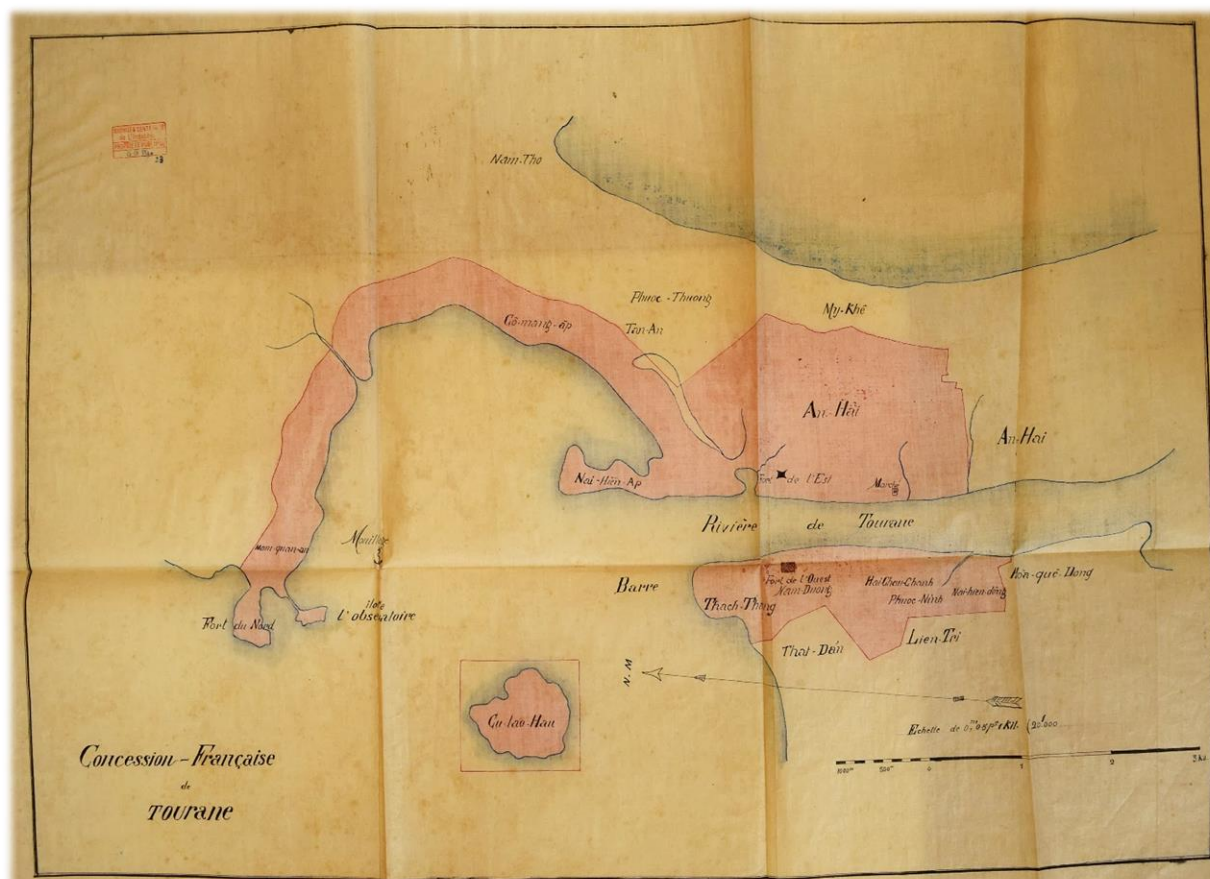


Fig. 2. “Concession française de Tourane” (1/20 000), Tourane, March 23, 1889. ANOM, GGI, F, 5990.

Finally, as was the case for the Chinese treaty ports, the question of demarcation of the Tourane concession became a source of tensions. In July 1889, emphasizing that “the area covered by the new map (fig. 3) is ten or even twenty times greater than the old one” (fig. 2), the *Cơ Mật* expressed its worries to the SRA and required major modifications [Ibid. *Cơ Mật* to SRA, 19 July & 9 Aug. 1889].

The strategy pursued in Tourane therefore looks very much like territorial “nibbling away”, as practiced in Shanghai or *Hà Nội* [Papin 2001: 227], with the difference that it was based here on considerations rooted in the past, which aimed precisely to break with previously existing models, to achieve mastery over an immediately very extensive territory. It is interesting to note that this policy ran up against the distrust of the *Cơ Mật* and that the French authorities revised their initial ambitions downward, at least until the end of the 19th century<sup>15</sup>, when the gigantic dimensions sketched in 1885 were finally approved formally.

<sup>15</sup> GG Piquet finally followed up the requests made by the *Cơ Mật*. The boundaries drawn in June 1889 were renegotiated and progressively adopted between 1892–1901. All in all, the extension of the concession followed the development of the port city [ANOM, GGI, F, 5990; NAVN4, RSA, E, 2493].



Fig. 3. Inspecteur des Bâtiments Civils, “Plan de la concession française de Tourane” (1/40 000), June 12, 1889. ANOM, GGI, F, 5990.

### Conclusion

All in all, the members of the Navelle Commission were the initiators — or at least the inspirers — of a new form of colonial domination in Indochina: the colonial enclave (or “micro-colony”) inside the territory of a protectorate.

The wishes and recommendations that they expressed in 1885 clearly took a stand in favor of sinking roots in a location, founded on a complete revision of the concession model that had prevailed until then in the open ports of Indochina. It was necessary to shift from a narrow to a gigantic vision to ensure definitive territorial control. This is precisely what flowed from the 1 Oct. 1888 ordinance, first for Tourane, then for *Hà Nội* and *Hải Phòng*. For instance, *Hà Nội* “extended over about 800 hectares” by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the concession, having become “a suburban zone by 1899, covered 5200 hectares” [Papin 2001: 226]<sup>16</sup>. As for Tourane, its limits were extended on 15 Jan. 1901 [Võ Văn Đạt 2019: 237–238], and other demands were formulated in the same logic in the 1930s [NAVN4, RSA, E, 2493], as the development of the port city displayed a genuine impetus.

Even more, the Commission had recommended to “Frenchified” these colonial enclaves to permit a fixed and durable settlement. In 1888 however, the first French installations, both public and

<sup>16</sup> A new request was also made by J. Decoux on 31 May 1942 [NAVN4, RSA, D, 1470].

private, remained under the jurisdiction of *Đại Nam* law; which meant the French did not hold them in full ownership, since they did not possess them juridically. On 1 Aug. 1888, three months before the proclamation of the ordinance, Mahé did not fail to note the prevailing legal situation, adding that “French laws concerning property” should become “the only ones in force” inside the concession. He conceived this change as an important decision, the consequences of which would be irreversible: “The Government of the protectorate would become the absolute master, could sell or grant concessions of land, perceive fiscal navigation, municipal and other rights” [ANOM, GGI, F, 5990]. Note that while the Commission had conceived the measure as one to be applied only in the framework of the new concession system to be applied in *Xuân Đài* and Tourane, in the end, the ordinance obtained by Richaud applied to two other key points of the peninsula: *Hà Nội* and *Hải Phòng*.

At a time when efforts were concentrated on repressing the *Cần Vương*, the formula could only be a colonial advantage. Its ambiguous character was underlined by contemporary observers, which is understandable since Annam remained juridically a protectorate (*La République française*, 1 Dec. 1888). In truth, Richaud’s move was far from adventurous: by methodically using the juridical vagueness that enveloped the concessionary clauses of the Patenôtre Treaty, it permitted a localised transfer of sovereignty, a sort of expropriation of slabs of Vietnamese territory, what is more in politically or economically strategic locations.

More broadly, this decision represented an additional step in the intrusive process used by France to establish a framework that placed *Đại Nam* under its tutelage. Viewed through a filter, it explains why the official doctrine came to assimilate the three concessions to colonies, even though they had been placed under the guidance of the Superior residents of Annam and Tonkin. From the administrative standpoint, their organization was also differentiated. Thus, the French concession of Tourane formed a distinct administrative unit from the other twelve provincial divisions of Annam. To this came to be added the establishment of municipalities, as early as 19 July 1888 for *Hà Nội* and *Hải Phòng*, and from 24 May 1889 in Tourane, where the municipal commission was sworn in on 31 Mar. 1892 [ANOM, GGI, F, 5992]. One way or the other, almost everything the Commission had suggest, was established.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Tourane was returned to the Vietnamese at the beginning of 1950 [ANOM, 1HCI, 160; NAVN1, Cabinet du chef de l’État du Việt Nam, E, 307].

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