

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY

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The maritime archaeological heritage of the Southeast Asian region is rich and unparalleled. The Southeast Asian territorial waters have served as the passageways for maritime trade, commerce and population movements in the region. For such a vast area the distribution of artifacts found in underwater archaeological context have been sparse and distributed widely through time but adequately delineate the area's phenomenal cultural past.

Former land archaeological sites situated in the region's continental shelves dating to the Pleistocene Period are now presently inundated by water. In more recent times numerous Southeast Asian as well as foreign boats, water vessels and other large ships which sailed the Southeast Asian seas and waterways sank and floundered in the region's waters. Hundreds of junks, sunken galleons and other trading vessels are believed to lie under Southeast Asia's territorial waters.

Succeeding frequent use of the region's seas and other waterways by the indigenous population as well as by foreign navigators and merchants gave them a central role in the development of a unique Southeast Asian culture and history. The role of maritime shipping and trade networks in shaping Southeast Asia's history and culture has been overwhelming as has been indicated by the archaeological materials recovered from land archaeological sites and through historical accounts (SPAFA 1884). Recent cursory maritime archaeological activities in Southeast Asia indicate the tremendous potential of underwater archaeological materials in complementing existing archaeological evidences and augmenting historical data.

Lately a number of the region's important underwater archaeological sites have been plundered by treasure-hunters, commercial salvors and poachers, resulting in the unfortunate depletion of the region's maritime archaeological resources (Bacani 1992:20-25).

The adequate protection and preservation of these maritime archaeological resources has now become a priority that needs to be immediately addressed if we are to elucidate Southeast Asia's rich historic and cultural past. These submerged archaeological sites and wrecks now form part of Southeast Asia's significant archaeological and historical records and are important components of the region's non-renewable maritime cultural resources.

The purpose of this paper is to

propose and present management objectives for maritime archaeology for the Southeast Asian region. Aspects of policies, depletion of the region's rich maritime cultural resources, development of the region's capacity for maritime archaeological research, conservation and cultural tourism and public awareness, shall also be addressed.

A SPECTS OF POLICIES

The lack of clearly delineated policies and legislations for the preservation and protection of the Southeast Asian maritime archaeological resources make it difficult for the member-states of Southeast Asia to adequately pursue a concerted course of action towards the protection of these important and non-renewable resources.

The intrusion of underwater treasure-hunters in Southeast Asian waters is a result, not so much by the implementation of strict policies in other parts of the world which safeguard their underwater cultural resources, as by the present prevailing conflicting policies and lack of strong legislations in the Southeast Asian region. This current situation, unfortunately, has abetted the depletion of the region's maritime archaeological resources (Gatbonton 1987).

The general policies of the majority of the member-states of Southeast Asia accommodate the active involvement of treasure-hunters in the region's territorial waters.

1. The commercial exploitations of maritime archaeological sites are prohibited in Thailand. A recent incident wherein the Royal Thai Navy confiscated over 10,000 pieces of recovered Thai ceramics looted from a shipwreck in the Gulf of Thailand indicates that country's will to stop the illegal looting of their underwater archaeological resources (Vatcharangkul 1992).

2. Vietnam has not publicly revealed a policy on this matter. However, it has been reported that Vietnam is disposing of, through auction, 28,000 porcelain items found off the southern port of Vung Tau in 1989 by a fisherman (Bacani 1992).

3. The Philippines is presently enforcing a policy of granting underwater archaeological exploration and excavation permits requiring the supervision of National Museum personnel. Permit grantees are given a portion of the finds. A separate office in the Philippines grants permits for treasure-hunting activities, the definition and limitations of which are still subjects of controversy (Ronquillo 1992:1-6).

4. Malaysia at present grants permits in wrecksites which have "no direct significance for Malaysian history." To ensure serious commitment on the part of the private sectors who are issued permits to survey and salvage historic wrecks, the company has to be locally registered with

Malaysians having shares. In addition, the company has to submit a bond or bank guarantee amounting to 200,000 Malaysian Ringgit. Only applications to survey and salvage a specific wreck are entertained (Taja and Mohd Radzi 1992).

5. The Indonesian Government has, since 1989, taken positive steps to revise its laws in their effort to safeguard their underwater heritage. In 1992 a new law concerning Items of Cultural Property ensure penalties of a maximum of ten years in jail and/or a maximum fine of one hundred million rupiah whomsoever intentionally damages or destroys cultural property and the site together with the surrounding area in which such (cultural) property is located or are carried off, moved, or are taken away (Ambary 1992:6-7).

Illegal searches and explorations for items of cultural property or valuable objects by means of diving, taking away, etc. without the permission from the authorities or the Indonesian Government is now meted with a penalty of a maximum of five years in jail and/or a maximum fine of fifty million rupiah. The proper enforcement of these ideal laws, however, still needs to be undertaken (ibid:7).

In addition to the above difficulty is the large Southeast Asian maritime areas that may not be adequately protected by the region's navies and coast guards. The present prevailing situation is conducive to the depletion of the region's maritime archaeological resources.

D EPLETION OF THE REGION'S MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of underwater treasure hunters, poachers and salvors operating in Southeast Asian territorial waters. This has been sufficiently presented in Asiaweek's March 6, 1992 issue.

In 1985 tradeware ceramics, porcelains and gold ingots from the Amsterdam-bound Dutch merchant ship Geldermalsen, which hit a reef off Sumatra and sank in 1752 was salvaged by Michael Hatcher a British national based in Australia. The cargo from this wreck fetched \$15 million at auction undertaken by Christie's at the Amsterdam Hilton. In all 150,000 porcelain pieces and 125 gold ingots were sold at the auction.

Rights to the Portuguese vessel, the Flor de la Mar which sunk off northern Sumatra are being contested by both Lisbon and Jakarta. Malaysia is also interested on this wreck. It wants back historical items they say the Portuguese plundered from the Malacca sultanate.

Recent technological breakthroughs in the field of underwater exploration equipments and techniques put the region's maritime archaeological resources at greater risk. Due to these

advances in underwater technology the region's maritime archaeological resources are becoming easily accessible at an increasingly faster rate which may eventually result in an unprecedented degree of destruction.

The existence of conflicting policies and weak legislations concerning the maritime archaeological resources by the region's member-states may well be one of the major reasons for the entry of numerous underwater treasure-hunters in Southeast Asian waters.

D EVELOPMENT OF THE REGION'S CAPACITY FOR MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The development of the Southeast Asian region's capacity for maritime archaeological research is one priority that must be addressed to properly protect and preserve the region's maritime archaeological resources.

SPAFA has undertaken steps in this direction. It has conducted a total of six Training Courses in Underwater Archaeology since 1978. These were all three-month courses which were all held in Thailand, the SPAFA Sub-Centre for Underwater Archaeology until the present time.

SPAFA has been, in addition, instrumental in sending Southeast Asians to participate in the Training

in Underwater Archaeology at the Department of Underwater Archaeology at Marseilles, France. These 3-month courses were undertaken in cooperation with the French Government. A Thai and a Filipino were able to avail of these trainings.

These training course included theoretical and practical aspects of underwater archaeological research, techniques in underwater archaeological explorations and excavations, history of sea-faring and navigation, and ship-building. The practical aspects of the course included the proper and effective use and maintenance of equipments, basic conservation techniques for underwater archaeological materials, and techniques of recording, dating and mapping.

In spite of the numerous SPAFA-sponsored Training Courses in Underwater Archaeology no member-state of SEAMEO and ASEAN is, at present, fully capable of conducting long-range underwater archaeological research work on their own. This may now be the right time for the region's member-states, (through SPAFA), to determine steps so that the Soutuheast Asian member-states may start to undertake cooperative and joint undertakings in maritime archaeological research. It is now fitting to approach the maritime archaeological sites in the Southeast Asian region with long-range management strategies as contrasted to short term procedures to individual underwater archaeological sites.

Closer cooperative ventures in

Australia, France, and the United States with academic and professional institutions such as the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology at Western Australia, the Direction des Recherches Archaeologiques Sous-Marines (DRASM) in Marseilles, France and the Institute for Nautical Archaeology at the University of Texas now need to be strengthened.

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ONSERVATION OF UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS

An important aspect that goes hand in hand with the capacity to undertake proper maritime archaeological research is the knowledge and application of appropriate conservation techniques to underwater archaeological materials. Maritime archaeological research is done only if and when adequate conservation measures are ensured or the maritime archaeological materials recovered.

Two SPAFA Training Courses in the Conservation of Underwater Archaeological Objects have been undertaken, one in 1978 and the other in 1984. Both training courses had durations of three months. As the requirement for properly trained conservators of underwater archaeological materials is expected to increase in the Southeast Asian region in the near future SPAFA needs to promote additional training courses in this specialized field of

conservation.

Active networking with underwater archaeology laboratories which have the technical expertise and personnel, such as the Western Australian Maritime Museum laboratory at Fremantle, Western Australia, would be an adequate first step to fulfill this important exigency of preserving the archaeological materials recovered from the region's underwater archaeological sites.

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LTUREL TOURISM AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

The region's maritime cultural resources have important tourism applications. Properly protected and managed these maritime archaeological sites may be converted into recreational underwater sites for the appreciation of tourists. The potential of underwater archaeological sites as recreational sites and tourist attractions are now only starting to be realized by the tourism industry and, properly managed and protected, may well be a good source of income for the region's tourism industry.

An increased public awareness and appreciation of Southeast Asia's maritime archaeological heritage may well be one of the best deterrents to the depletion of the region's important and non-renewable maritime

archaeological resources. The region's diverse populations— school teachers and students, Customs, Coast Guard and Navy officers, local and foreign tourists, sports divers—need, through public education, to be made aware of the value of their regional maritime archaeological resources. Politicians in the region, more importantly, should likewise be made aware of the significance of the maritime archaeological heritage. This hopefully may lead to the enactment of stronger legislations for their protection. Appropriate funding may likewise be ensured for the proper enforcement of these legislations as well as for underwater archaeological excavations and publications of results.

Museums, Research Centres for Archaeology and Departments of Anthropology/Archaeology in universities in the Southeast Asian region may need to incorporate public education programmes which are designed to inform the public about the region's rich maritime archaeological resources through exhibitions, lectures, tapes and slides.

Regional organizations such as SPAFA and ASEAN now need to exert greater effort to enhance public education programmes on the importance of the the Southeast Asian region's maritime archaeological resources.

SEAMEO-SPAFA and ASEAN, as the two regional organizations which are

in the forefront of cultivating the awareness and appreciation of Southeast Asia's cultural heritage as well as promoting and enriching the archaeological and cultural activities in the region, now need to redirect their efforts to ensure the effective protection and preservation of the region's rich maritime cultural heritage.

As policy for an effective and region-wide agreement to help ensure the adequate protection and preservation of Southeast Asia's maritime archaeological heritage the following STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES are here put forward:

1. The Southeast Asian maritime archaeological heritage belongs to the people of the region and is an important component for the proper understanding and appreciation of the area's history, society and culture;
2. The region's maritime archaeological heritage deserves the adequate and effective protection and preservation by the member-states through SPAFA and ASEAN;
3. The maritime archaeological heritage of the region shall consist of all Cultural Properties, including those belonging to other cultures, as long as they are found in Southeast Asian territorial waters—seas, rivers and lakes—and, therefore, may have played an important and significant role in the evolution of the

region's society and culture;

4. Only representatives from BONA FIDE scientific institutions and organizations are allowed to undertake underwater archaeological explorations and excavations activities in Southeast Asian waters; underwater treasure-hunters present a serious threat to the region's maritime cultural heritage and, therefore, are not allowed to interfere with the region's maritime archaeological heritage;

5. Materials recovered from the region's underwater archaeological sites are to be kept together as a total collection in the country where the archaeological resources are found; these should be dispersed only for archaeological analyses and exchange among museums. Under no circumstances should these be apportioned with, separated or sold to any private entity;

6. Museums in the Southeast Asian region should only acquire and display underwater archaeological materials which have been recovered through systematic and legal archaeological excavations.

These STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES are deemed relevant as the Southeast Asian maritime archaeological resources are perceived in regional terms instead of being merely of interest only to the different individual member-states.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Until recently there has been no international organization that undertakes activities specifically conceptualized for the appropriate protection and management of the world's underwater archaeological heritage.

In November, 1991 the International Committee on the Underwater Cultural Heritage was formally recognized by the International Council of Monuments and Sites (IC

OMOS) in Paris, France. Conceived and presently operating under ICOMOS Australia the committee is now in the process of (a) identifying problem areas in the administration of and in the international cooperation for the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH), (2) examination of the mechanisms for extending the concept of World Heritage listing to certain UCH sites, (3) a review of national policies and programmes and (4) the promotion of international projects.

This is one committee that SEAMEO-SPAFA and ASEAN may network with in the near future if only to outline appropriate steps to be undertaken to start, in earnest, the indispensable and immediate protection of the region's maritime archaeological resources.

OVERVIEW

The importance of the Southeast Asian maritime cultural heritage cannot be overemphasized. It is tragic, however, that these important and non-renewable components of the region's cultural heritage are also subject to plunder, near-sighted exploitation and vandalism. This is unfortunate because a region's maritime cultural heritage, properly managed and protected, has important educational, recreational and tourism applications.