

“Where’s Saigon?”

**Another
Paul Rowe
HISTORY MYSTERY**

The question
“Where’s Saigon?”
can be interpreted in two ways.

“Where is Saigon?”

and “Where was Saigon?”

First, let's answer the question about

“Where is Saigon?”

It is the easy part.

So, “Where is Saigon today?”

Today (2019) Saigon is an **imaginary place**
in the equivalent of Ho Chi Minh City’s ‘downtown’.

You hear tourists and locals talk of Saigon.
They are all probably talking about different areas.

Some talk about Saigon as if it is Ho Chi Minh City.
That is incorrect – Ho Chi Minh City is Ho Chi Minh City.

Some talk about Saigon as if it is District 1.

District 1 is one of 25 districts
which make up Ho Chi Minh City,
and none of them are named Saigon.

Category:Districts of Ho Chi Minh City

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Pages in category "Districts of Ho Chi Minh City"

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Some talk about Saigon as if it is part of District 1.

District 1 is comprised of 10 wards,
none of them called Saigon.

District 1 is subdivided into ten wards, namely Bến Nghé, Bến Thành, Cô Giang, Cầu Kho, Cầu Ông Lãnh, Đa Kao, Nguyễn Thái Bình, Nguyễn Cư Trinh, Phạm Ngũ Lão, and Tân Định. Each ward has its own People's Committee, subordinate to the People's Committee of District 1.^[2]

Wikipedia

Again,
today Saigon is an **imaginary place** at downtown HCMC.

However, the other half of the question is far more interesting.

“Where was Saigon?”

During the colonization of Vietnam, Saigon was easy to find.

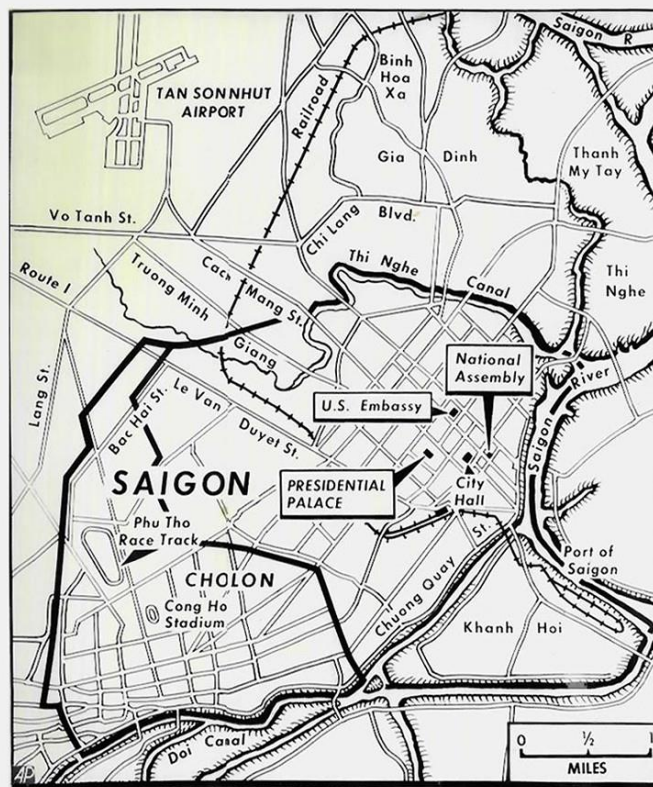
It was on the western bank on a bend of the Saigon River.

It was considered the economic capital of Vietnam.

It was the Paris of Asia.

Saigon was very well known and often visited.

Typical colonial map of Saigon up to 1975



(NY33-April 22) This map of Saigon is transmitted in response to member request. It is for use as developments warrant. (AP Wirephoto Map) (pr31555ar)1975

Maps Vietnam

I am interested in a far more **intriguing version**
of the question, “Where was Saigon?”

I want to know “Where was Saigon” **BEFORE** the French?

When the French formally arrived in Vietnam,
they battled for, and claimed the important trading port of
Ben Nghe on the western bank of a bend on the Saigon River.

And then, for some unknown reason, they re-named it Saigon.

Conquerors often change the names of conquered countries,
cities, towns, streets, etc.

They usually name it after famous people or places from their
home country.

One might imagine that the French may have called the
recently conquered Ben Nghe,
New Paris, or Port Bonaparte, or something similar.
They did not. They called it Saigon, a Vietnamese name.
They changed one Vietnamese name for another.
Not the pattern of conquerors. Strange...

But, before we try and make sense of this,
I must try to clarify something.

When the French took over,
I am not sure if Ben Nghe was actually called Ben Nghe.
That busy port on the bend of the Saigon River may still have
been called Gia Dinh.

During the period of the early Nguyen Dynasty emperors they designated an area called Gia Dinh prefecture.

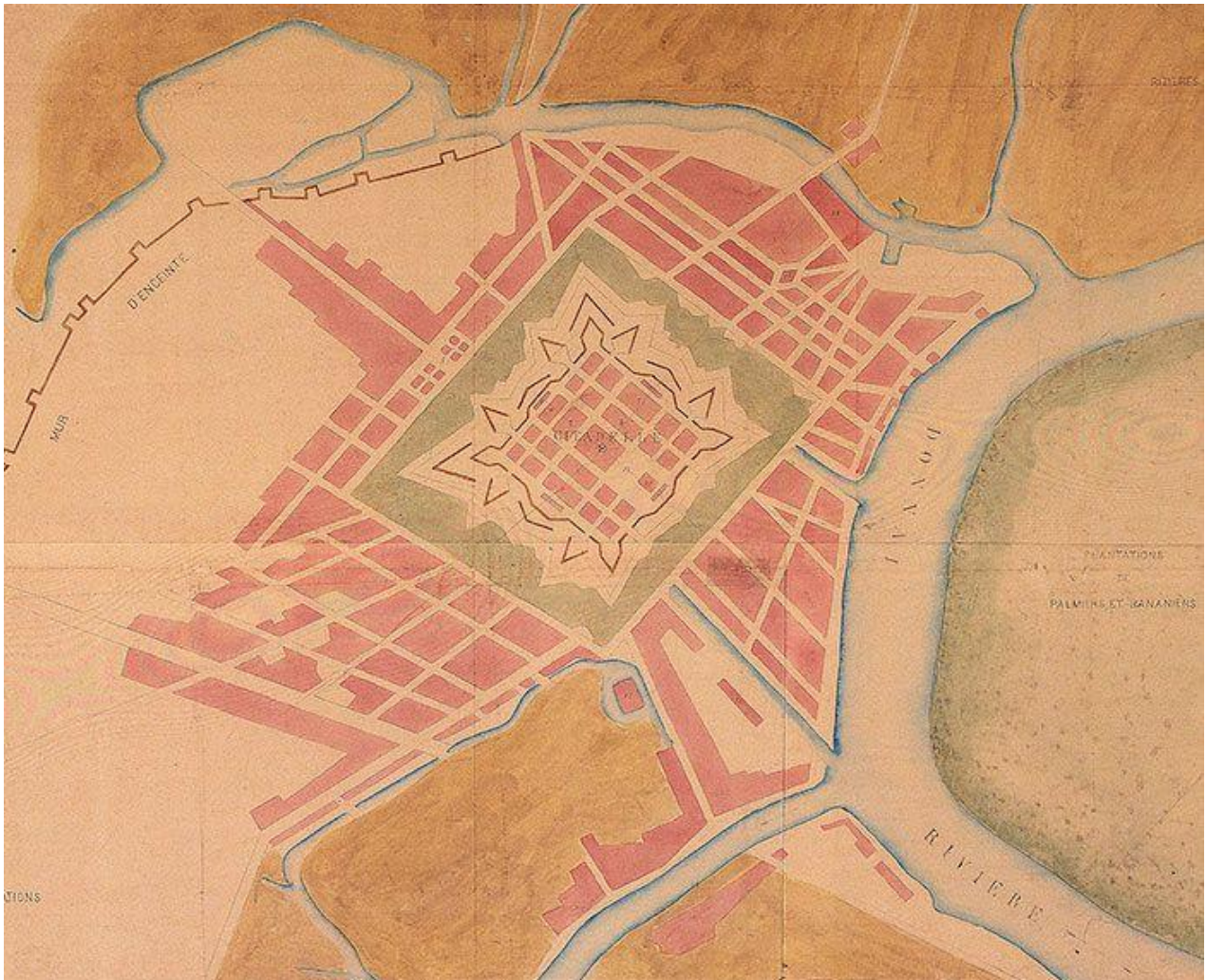
The Gia Dinh prefecture was an extremely fertile strip of land which ran from Vietnam's western border to the coast.



Six Provinces of Southern Vietnam - Wikipedia

To guard this valuable rice growing prefecture (and to ensure the protection of his rice, and the collection of his rice tax) Emperor Nguyen Phuc Anh built a massive citadel in the dynamic trading port on the bend of the river.

The place was called Gia Dinh, but for how long?



Saigoneer

Paul Rowe 2019

Was the place where the citadel was built named
Ben Nghi then? Probably.

Anyway, the Turtle Citadel (it looked like a turtle) was such a dominant feature throughout the Gia Dinh prefecture, that everyone started calling the citadel, the Gia Dinh Citadel.

And then, across time, because the Gia Dinh Citadel was such a dominant feature on the bend of the river, everyone started calling the place around it the town of Gia Dinh.

When the builder of the citadel unified old Dia Viet (original Viet territory around Hanoi and down to the central region) with new Dia Viet (newly claimed pioneer country in the southern region) he set his new capital city of Vietnam in Hue.

The emperor move out of Gia Dinh citadel and Gia Dinh town.

The emperor handed the responsibility of the
Gia Dinh Citadel to Viceroy Le Van Khoi.
Eventually, control of such a powerful military
resource was too much for the Viceroy.
He started calling himself king.
He started building the citadel even taller.

By this time, Gia Long's son, Emperor Minh Mang
was on the throne.

After a three year battle with the Viceroy,
the emperor took back the Gia Dinh Citadel.

To ensure that the citadel would never be used against the Nguyen Dynasty again, Emperor Minh Mang totally destroyed the Gia Dinh Citadel.

(The Gia Dinh Citadel was destroyed quarter of a century before the French arrived.)

After the Gia Dinh Citadel was destroyed,
did the town continue with the name Gia Dinh?

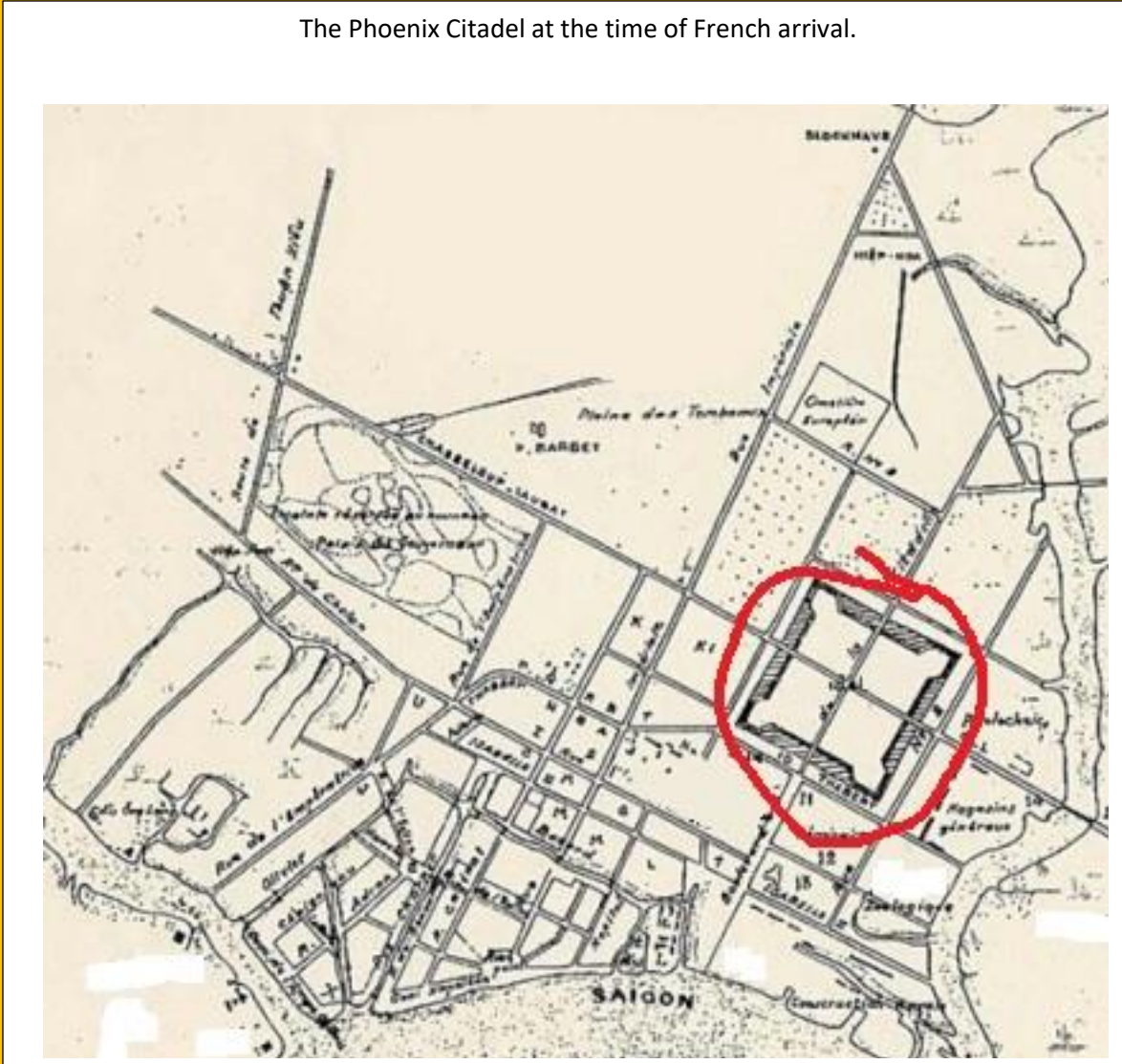
Or did it go back to being called Ben Nghe?

Both names seemed popular.

[Even today both names are seen and used all over the city.]

Minh Mang then built the much smaller Phoenix Citadel.

The Phoenix Citadel at the time of French arrival.



Citadel of Saigon 1867 Wikipedia

The French needed to destroy this citadel to claim the place on the river.

So at the time of French conquest, the Vietnamese may have called the port on the bend on the river, Gia Dinh (because the prefecture was still there), or they may have reverted back to calling it Ben Nghe.

When the French arrived, the place on the bend of the river was possibly being called Gia Dinh.

Even though the new citadel was officially known as the Phoenix Citadel, people now called it the Gia Dinh Citadel.

This makes sense, because the citadel still guarded the Gia Dinh prefecture.

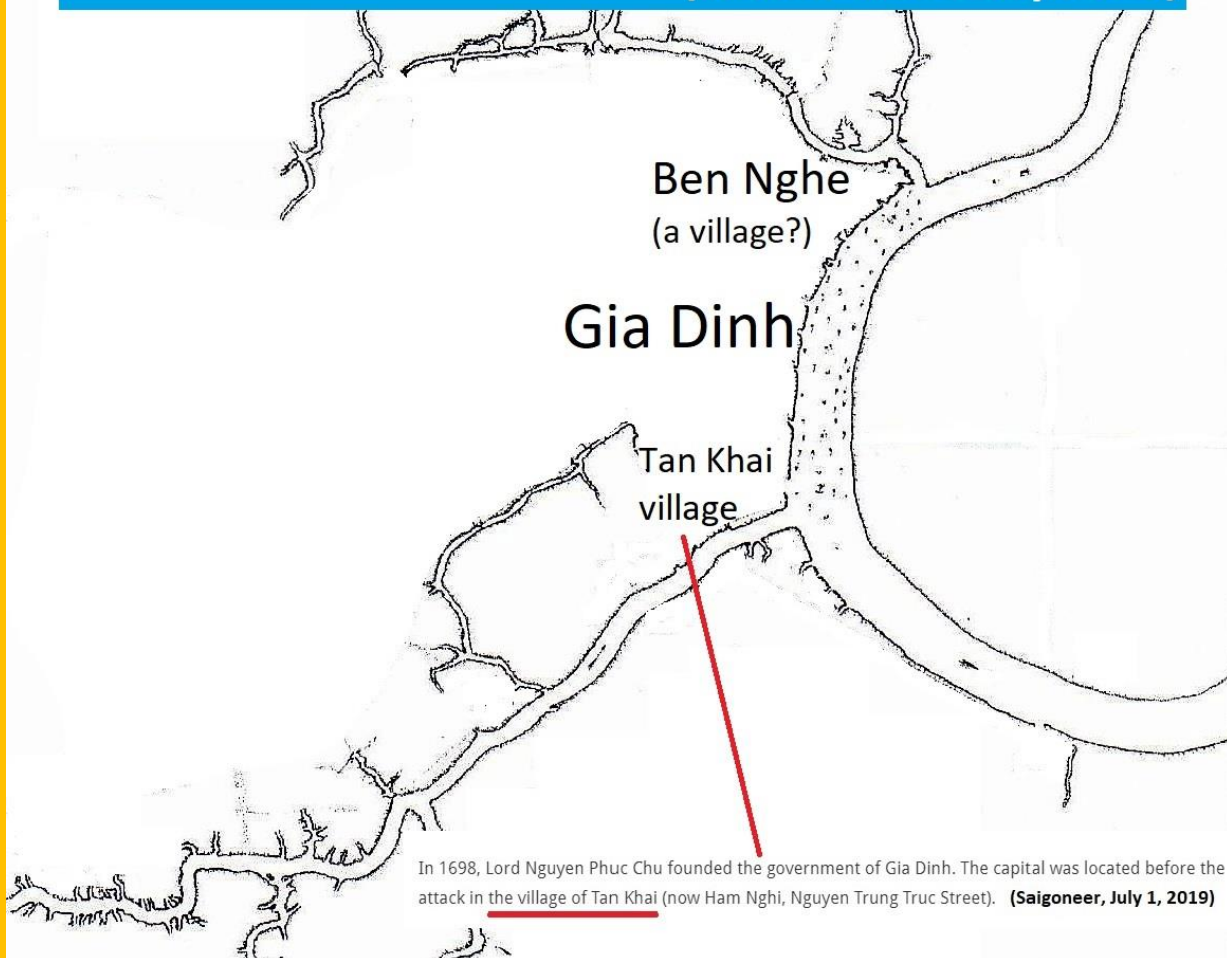
And therefore, they might have continued to call the place around the citadel, the town of Gia Dinh.

(Ben Nghe, by this time, could have been a village, district or a ward of Gia Dinh.

As today, it is a ward of District 1 in HCMC.)

My version of the places that may have been here when the French conquered this part of the river in 1859.

(Paul Rowe 2 July 2019)



So that brings us back to the French
and the renaming of their conquest
'Saigon'.

Why might have they thought it was Saigon?

Did they simply misread the place name?

Believe it or not,
this was a common blunder with many colonizers.

What may have caused the confusion?

At the time of the French arrival,
there was a place nearby named Saigon.

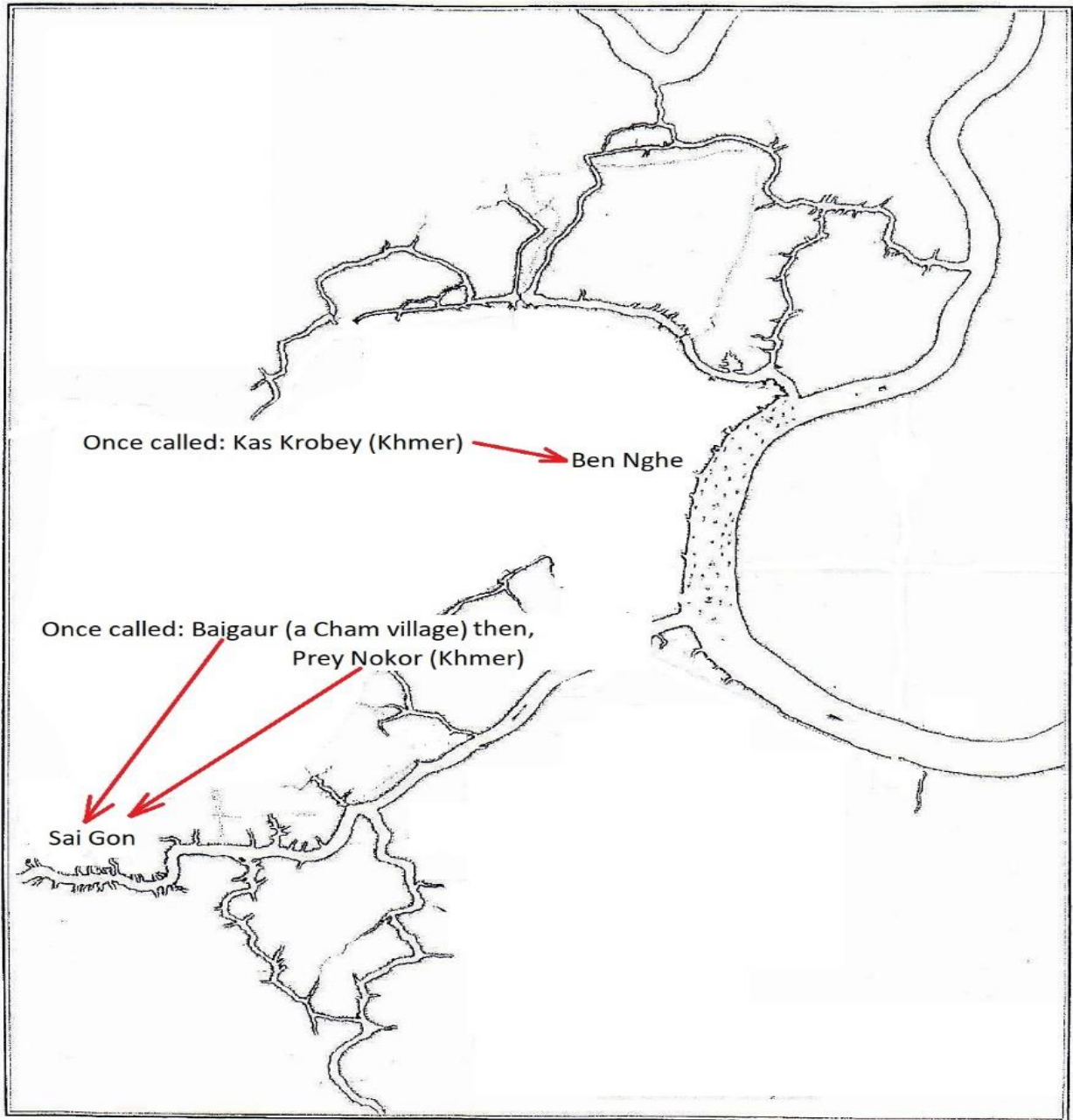
It was already old.

**My version of the places that may have
been here when the French conquered
this part of the river in 1859.**

(Paul Rowe 2 July 2019)



Another reason for the hypothesized confusion of the early French colonizers, might have stemmed from the fact that this area and places within it were old, and had **changed names many times.**



Sketch by Paul Rowe 2019

"... the Cham village of Baigaur, then became the Khmer Prey Nokor ..." (Francis. p. 353. ISBN 1-884964-04-4).

<http://dotrongdanh.vn/wp/2018/12/11/nam-1698-den-nam-1779/>



From:

Vietnamese

To:

English

At the end of 1679, Nguyen lord allowed the Minh's tribes of Tran Thuong Xuyen to enter Bien Hoa as the real land of Lord Nguyen as if it were his own management, as well as areas where Vietnamese people were reclaimed from the beginning of the century. 17.

In 1697, Nac Ong Non's son, Nac Ong Yem, came back from Saigon to Oudong to marry his daughter, Mr. Thu, so that later Yem could link Thu's throne as Chan Lap king. From now on in Saigon there is no satrap.

1698 (75 years after establishing the first tax collection station at Prei Nokor (Saigon), Kas Krobei (Ben Nghe) - in 1623 and 40 years after Nguyen received the Moai (Ba Ria) and Dong Nai regions. "Border" of Vietnam - in 1658), Minh Vuong Nguyen Phuc Chu commanded the Minister Nguyen Huu Canh to enter the South to work, to establish Gia Dinh government, to set Tran Tran Dinh and Tran Bien Dinh, formally establishing the unit. Dai Viet's administration in the southern region and it was the first border-domain economy - then the land expanded throughout the eastern South as it is today.

In 1698, Minh Vuong Nguyen Phuc Chu ordered General Nguyen Huu Canh to go to the South to work.

Source: National Archives Center 4 - Nguyen Dynasty woodblocks

He set up a headquarters in Cu Lao Pho by speedy remarks in all aspects: the land is vastly deserted but all are swampy and dense forests; human resources are weak, the living life of the people is too crude, it is very

So, in 1859, the French named
whatever was there on the river bend
Saigon.

The former 'Saigon' then had no name,
and it started to be called Cho Lon (market fields).
Present day District 5,
Cho Lon, was once called Saigon.

From *The Making of Saigon* by Dr. Vu

The Dr. is describing the creation of the early canals.

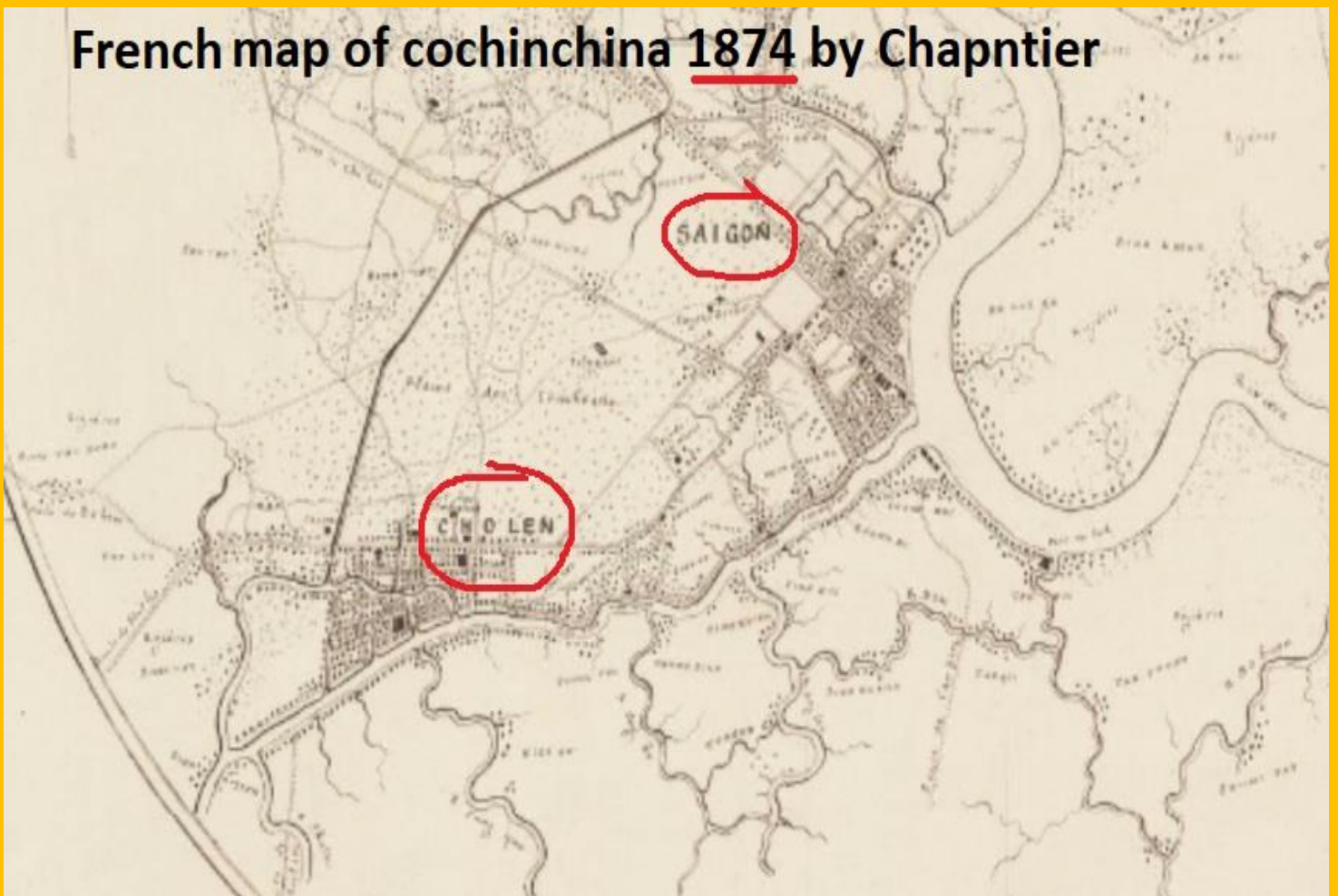
"The first ones were dug in Saigon, which is today's Cho Lon."

from the Mekong Delta being the most sought after commodity. As the war between the Nguyễn and the Trịnh intensified, the need for rice increased accordingly. Many new canals were dug by hand during this period for the small natural rivers and creeks serving the area tended to silt up during the dry season, forcing merchants to cease all activities and wait until the water was high enough to travel again. The delay during the dry season became intolerable to the Nguyễn authority. They ordered an extensive clean-up of the existing canals and for new canals to be dug to facilitate the flow of water. The first ones were dug in Saigon, which is today's Chợ Lớn. A major canal called Ruột Ngựa was created in 1772, so called because it was 'as straight as a horse gut'. When completed, this canal played a crucial role in the flow of riverine traffic in and out of the then Saigon.

Other canals followed suit after Saigon became a refuge for the Nguyễn Lords two years later. Some canals were dug by official orders, others by residents to answer to their particular needs such as the Phó Xếp in today's Chợ Lớn. Dug in 1778 by the Ming loyalists who emigrated to the area from their enclave in Biên Hòa after they were massacred by the Tây Sơn in 1773. The Chinese refugees resettled on the high ground here and lived by growing vegetables, the new canal Phó Xếp was much needed for their produce to reach the market at Bến Nghé, via the existing system of waterways linking the area with the ports.

So French era maps showed this.

French map of cochinchina 1874 by Chapntier



And right through to the finish of colonization,
maps showed a place on a bend of the river called

Saigon

and another place nearby called

Cho Lon.

“Where’s Saigon?”

Another Paul Rowe HISTORY MYSTERY

SOLVED

In the near future I will research, vlog and blog
another History Mystery about Saigon.

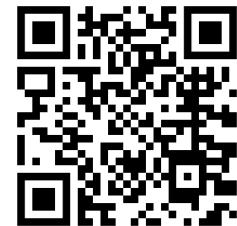
The mystery: **Where's the Saigon River?**

MEET the AUTHOR: and discover Saigon



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Paul Rowe

