



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

Volume I Number 1 September 2004

Editors :

Roxanna M. Brown

Pariwat Thammaprechakorn

Reporters :

Allison Diem

Walter Kassela

Timothy Rebbeck

Museum staff :

Burin Singtoaj

Utaiwan Chatuporn

Southeast Asian Ceramics
Museum
Bangkok University
Rangsit campus
Phahonyothin Road
Pathum Thani 12120

Tel.: (66-2) 902-0299
Ext.:2892
Fax: (66-2) 516-6115

museumnewsletter@bu.ac.th

Inside this issue:

Burmese celadon	1
Letter from The editor	1
Book review	2
News briefs	3-4

More Burmese celadon

AFTER HEARING from Dr. Myo Thant Tyn that more kilns had recently been discovered near Pathein, two personnel from the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum went to investigate the finds. Like the Twante kilns that were found in 1999, the newly discovered kilns also produced celadon glazed ware. Pariwat Thammaprechakorn and Burin Singtoaj spent a week in Burma during February 2004 visiting both the old and new sites.

The Pathein area sites were discovered in February 2003 during a tour of the area by Dr. Myo, Don Hein, and Aung Bo. Seven kilns were identified at Thalukkhwar village, 7 miles west of Pathein, and another 20 were found at Nwepark, 5 miles south of Thalukkhwar. In addition to numerous fragments of celadon in the Pathein area sites, one fragment of green and white dish was recovered at Nwepark. One fragment is not enough proof for local production, and thus the

production site of this type of ware remains unknown.



Twante celadon dish collected by local resident U Than Tin, a member of the Myanmar Ceramic Society, who discovered the first kilns in the area in 1999

This is the fourth known area of old celadon production. The first area, with an estimated 100 kilns (Hein 2003), lies between Yangon and Bago. The second is near Twante, where nearly a thousand kilns are now known.

The first Twante kiln, which is located about 2 miles southeast of the city, was discovered in February 1999 (Myo 2003), and a group of international scholars visited the site later that year before preceding on to a ceramics seminar held at



This fragment from a wall plaque with brown, green and white lead glazes is kept at the Shwegugyi monastery near Pago

Bagan.

The third area is at Ngaputaw town, 20 miles west of Myaungmya Myohaung, where Dr Myo and Don Hein found kilns in late 1999.



Phaygyi, Twante kiln site No.2, which was excavated by Tsuda Takanori in March-May 2002. Site No. 1 was excavated in 1999.

Continued on p. 2

Letter from the editor

With this newsletter, the staff of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum wishes to announce our presence. The museum, which is located at the Rangsit campus of Bangkok University, is expected to open to the public sometime in early 2005. The official opening dates will be announced in due course. In the meantime we have decided to begin publication of a monthly newsletter with this initial number for September 2004. We are sending approximately 100 copies via e-mail to persons we believe will be interested in our activities. If you do not wish to be on the list, please let me know. If you know others who would like to receive it, please let me know that. If you have comments and/or news items of your own, please share them with us. If you want to visit, even before the museum is formally open, do not hesitate to contact us. One of the important goals of the museum is to provide research assistance, and a goal for the newsletter is to keep everyone up-to-date on new developments in the study of ceramics, both indigenous and imported, in Southeast Asia.

Roxanna M. Brown

museumnewsletter@bu.ac.th

Book Review

Sumitr Pitiphat, *Ceramics from the Thai-Burma Border*. Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 2003.

SOMETIMES CALLED the Tak-Omkoi sites, an extraordinary complex of cemeteries were unearthed in the mountains along the Thai-Burma border in the mid 1980s. The looting poured thousands of old artifacts onto the antiques market in 1984-1986. For Thai archaeologists, who were out-numbered, far away, and lacked both financial and institutional support, it was a losing battle. The market prevailed. An investment of physical labor on the part of mostly illiterate farmers at the fringes of Thai society (many had never been granted Thai citizenship) earned wealth unimaginable otherwise from a seemingly insatiable urban clientele. Rare, perfect pieces brought extraordinary prices, and a great number of them went overseas, especially to Japan. Only about one-third of the best remained in Thailand.

No one counted the number of graves, nor itemized the finds. At first, few persons even realized that old burial sites were involved.

The digging was too haphazard for any observer to imagine the original placement of the artifacts. Even the hilltribe people rarely agreed on whether they had encountered bones or not.

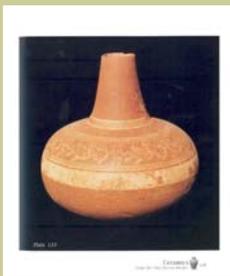
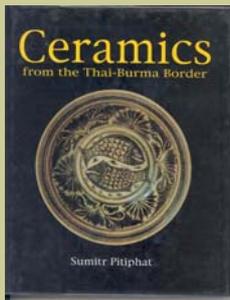
Looking at the ceramics as a whole, stacked at village huts or jumbled together in antique shops, one could see that the majority, perhaps 90% of them, represented a period of 200-300 years in the 14th-16th centuries. In Thai history they belonged approximately to the period of the founding of Ayutthaya in A.D. 1351 and the Burmese invasions of northern Thailand in the late 1500s.

The finds, personal possessions of a mysterious unknown population, comprised jewelry, including beads, bronze bangles and sometimes gold; iron and bronze objects such as small 'jingle' bells, lime pots, knives, spears and daggers; plus ceramics from at least half a dozen kiln centers within Thailand itself, as well as from Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and China. The variety of ceramics was astounding. Yuan-dynasty Chinese blue and white ware and early wares from the Thai Sawankhalok kilns, rare elsewhere in the region, were present. Masses of unbroken northern Thai ceramics became available for the first time.

Green and white ceramics, previously undocumented, were discovered and eventually attributed to Burma. All this was there in undeveloped highlands thought to be devoid of cultural or historical significance.

Yet information about the burial sites is scattered and thin. In the 1980s, there was a scattering of articles in the Thai press, some in the *Siam Society's Newsletter*, and a couple in international art magazines, but there was never a summary. The number of artifacts coming onto the antiques market at the beginning of 1987 was only about 10% of the amount available earlier. Public interest, likewise, rapidly dwindled.

Thankfully, Thai scholar Sumitr Pitiphat did not lose interest. Instead, he completed a fairly comprehensive survey of the sites and the ceramics recovered. The study was completed in 1992, but it was not widely available. Now, however, the Thai text has been translated into English and published with color photographs that document the main categories of recovered ceramics. It is a welcome addition to the literature on archaeological ceramics in Southeast Asia. RMB



Sumitr Pitiphat : CERAMICS FROM THE THAI-BURMA BORDER. 7.5X9", 190 pp., 115 plates, hard cover with jacket, 2003. ISBN 974-91468-4-1.

Overseas US\$58 (airmail)
Price in Thailand Baht 1,600.

Send a postal money order, postal bill of exchange, or cheque payable to Pariwat Thammapreechakorn at Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Bangkok University, Rangsit campus; Khlong Luang, Pathum Thani 12120

For more information, e-mail
Pariwat.t@bu.ac.th

More Burmese celadon, continued from page 1



Above: Dr. Myo Thant Tyn (far left), Pariwat Thammapreechakorn (second left), local ceramics enthusiasts U Than Tin and U Win Kyaing, and Burin Singtoaj (far right) at Twante.



Below: Dishes from the Patheingyi kilns with distinctive tick 3-leg stacking supports, a type of support not found at Twante

References

Hein, Don, 2003. *Archaeological Fieldwork at Myaung Bya, Bagan and other Sites in Myanmar*. Australia: Deakin University.

Myo Thant Tyn, 2003. *East and Middle East, the Convergence of East and Middle East Glazed Ceramic Traditions in Myanmar*. Yangon, Myanmar: SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition, pp. 23-49.

Myo Thant Tyn and Dawn Rooney, 2001. Ancient Celadon in Myanmar, a New Ceramic Discovery, *Orientations*, 32/4 (April): 57-61.

News Briefs

MELBOURNE SCHOLARS

The sale of the Binh Thuan shipwreck (see p. 4) brought local scholars together on February 21, 2004 for a seminar organized by the National Gallery of Victoria and the Asian Arts Society of Australia with assistance from Monash University. Seen here are (left to right) Ray Hearn, who recently earned a PhD in Thai ceramics; Alice Conway; Tony Conway, head of ceramics at La Trobe University, Bendigo; Gary Hill, La Trobe University Bendigo, who is currently researching Thai ceramics for a postgraduate degree; Elaine Doling, who specializes on Buddhist iconography; and Don Hein, a field archaeologist who has excavated the Sawankhalok kilns, along with his wife Toni who is well practiced in archaeological record keeping.



DONATION

Four rare upright shapes from the Thai Sukhothai kilns were donated to the museum by Sten Sjostrand. They were recovered from the Turiang shipwreck (c. AD 1400) off Malaysia. The donation includes two ring-handle jars and two pear-shaped bottles. The pear-shape bottle appears to have been introduced into Thai ceramics only about AD 1400, while the ring-handle jar appears earlier. The Turiang shipwreck, for the time being, provides the earliest archaeological context for Sukhothai ceramics.



GRADUATION DAY

Ceramics conservation was taught for the first time in early 2004 at Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh. Shown here with their teachers -- ceramics conservator Bonnie Baskin (center rear) and assistant conservators Ms. Pich Thyda and Ms. Chap Sopheara (assistant conservator Mr. Tep Sokha took the photo) -- are the 21 students who each received a Certificate in Archaeological Ceramics. It is the first such certificate ever awarded in Cambodia or elsewhere in Southeast Asia.



THE WANLI WRECK

A shipwreck that was partially excavated off the coast of Malaysia in June-July 2004 yielded finds that suggest it is a European (possibly Portuguese) vessel that may belong to about 1630-1650. The ship was originally given the site name 'Wanli Wreck' by Sten Sjostrand, who located it last year when he thought it must date to about 1600. The photograph shows ceramics from the site on view at the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur where they were added to the popular Malaysian Maritime Archaeology exhibition. More detailed news and many more photographs are available at www.mingwrecks.com.



SIAM SOCIETY LECTURE

Dr. R. Brown receives a gift of books from Mira Kim of the Siam Society after presenting the lecture 'Shipwreck Evidence for the Dating of Thai Trade Ceramics' on 29 April 2004. By analyzing shipwrecks with cargoes of trade ceramics it is now possible to propose six distinct phases of Thai production covering two centuries, *circa* 1380-1580.



MUSEUM VOLUNTEER NO. 1

Our very first museum volunteer, Hannah E. Palmer, spent the month of April 2004 in Bangkok, coming into the museum most afternoons. She is a graduate from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a degree in Art History and English, and an elementary school teacher in Los Angeles, California.



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum

The museum houses an initial collection of 2,050 ceramics donated by Mr. Surat Osathanugrah. With few exceptions, these ceramics were all found in Thailand. There is pottery from as early as about 3,000 BC and as late as the 19th century.

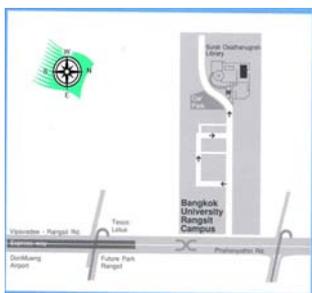
There are ceramics from production centers in Thailand as well as ceramics that were imported in olden times.

Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

Display galleries show all the types of ceramics found in Thailand and the technology involved in local Thai production. The museum collections include kiln site wasters and fragments that are essential for teaching ceramics dating and identification.

It is also home to one of the largest collections of ceramics from the 14th-16th centuries Tak-Omkoi sites of western Thailand. The Museum will open to the general public in early 2005.

Interior museum views



The displays seen here show (upper left) the variety of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1400, (upper right) the Chinese Yuan-dynasty blue and white ware that inspired both Southeast Asian and later Chinese ceramics, (middle left) unique works of art, and (lower right) the variety of ring-handle shaped jars.

Left: the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum is located at the Rangsit campus of Bangkok University.

More news briefs

AUCTION USA

William Bunch Auction & Appraisals offered Southeast Asian ceramics to the public on 7 June 2004. They were sold on behalf of West Chester University, and both West Chester University and William Bunch declined responsibility for authenticating the materials. This meant possible bargains for collectors with a good eye. Some 200 ceramics of varying quality and provenance sold for prices ranging from US\$15 for green and white bowls identified as Burmese to an average \$100 for many Thai pieces. The highest price, US\$600, which reportedly came in a telephone bid, went for the fine Thai jar shown here.



AUCTION MELBOURNE

Christie's Melbourne hosted the sale of ceramics from the Binh Thuan shipwreck, which sank off the coast of Vietnam in perhaps AD 1608. Although the head of excavation, Michael Flecker, also wrote a short article for *Heritage Asia*, a Malaysian magazine ['Treasures of the Binh Thuan Shipwreck,' I/4 (August) 7-11], the auction catalogue itself is likely to remain the most authoritative text on this important site. The catalogue begins with a 14-page account of the wrecksite archaeology by Flecker. Then come the auction photographs and descriptions. Collection of representative pieces were kept for museums in Vietnam.

