



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

## Editors :

Roxanna M. Brown

Pariwat Thammapreechakorn

## Reporters :

Bonnie Baskin, Peter Burns, Philippe Colomban, Eusebio Dizon, Pamela Gutman, Gary Hill, Walter Kassela, Timothy Rebbeck, David Rehfuss, Jennifer Rodrigo, Dawn Rooney, Mohd. Sherman bin Sauffi, Sten Sjostrand, Heidi Tan, Augustine Vinh

## Museum staff :

Burin Singtoaj

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](mailto:museumnewsletter@bu.ac.th)

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## Shipwreck ceramics for sale in Kuala Lumpur

THOUSANDS OF MING blue and white porcelain, celadon and underglaze black ware from nine shipwreck sites will go on sale at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from 2-11 September 2005. The wreck sites cover three major periods in shipwreck history: the Southeast Asian golden age of 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, pre-S. E. Asian, and post-S. E. Asian periods. The oldest site offers Chinese ware from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries; and the latest two belong to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Sales will begin on Saturday afternoon, 2 September, after a public symposium on shipwrecks and shipwreck ceramics is presented at 8:30 – 1 p.m. The speakers include Sten Sjostrand, who excavated the wrecksites; Roxanna M. Brown from the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum; Valerie Esterhuizen, a specialist on Chinese ceramics from shipwrecks off the South African coast; Cao Jian Wen from the Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute; and Dato Adi Haji Taha, Director General of the Department of Museums and Antiquities.

Malaysia's Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Dato' Seri Dr. Rais Yatim, will attend a pre-sale gala dinner on Thursday 1st

September where 15 selected pieces will be auctioned.

The sale comes after the excavation of The Wanli Shipwreck and the legal sharing of the recovered artifacts between Nanhai Marine Archaeology and the Department of Museums and Antiquities. Ceramics were shared in agreed proportions in the case of multiple examples. The very best examples and unique pieces, however, went only to the department. The sale ceramics come from Sjostrand's share, which he is allowed to sell in order to recover the expenses of the excavation.

A 30-minute introduction to shipwrecks will be shown on Malaysian Airlines incoming flights beginning in August.

Prices will range from about US\$15 to \$1000-5000. For more information, see [www.treasuresofthenanhai.com](http://www.treasuresofthenanhai.com).

*Top to bottom: sale logo; kendi and dish, Wanli Wreck. Two curators from the National Museum, Sharifa Lok Lok binti Syed Idrus and Mohd. Hazilas bin Mat Hashim help document Wanli Wreck ceramics. A full archaeological report & catalogue will appear in 2006.*



## Letter from the editor

ON HIS WAY to Bangkok, Tran Ky Phuong (Champa story, p. 3) stopped in Hanoi to visit Tran Quoc Vuong, a leading Vietnamese historian who was in hospital with cancer. Then, on 8<sup>th</sup> August, Vietnamese news sources reported that Vuong had died early that morning. I had met both Vuong and Ky on a research trip to Vietnam in 1990, and both scholars have considerably enriched my life since then. The last time I saw Vuong was in Singapore in August 2004 at a Champa conference when he looked a bit frail but still flowed with energy. Without Vuong's presence, Vietnam studies will not be so vibrant. Nonetheless he leaves behind legions of students. Vuong is seen here with Peter Burns (Univ of Adelaide) and at the Champa Museum, Danang in 1990.

## In memory: Tran Quoc Vuong



## Letters to the editor

### Pariwat thesis

I read with interest about Pariwat's thesis. I wonder if there is any chance of asking him for a copy - is it in English? It's a topic that I was interested in when I was at SOAS but did not get much chance to pursue.

— Heidi Tan, Singapore

Editor: The thesis is written in Thai, but Pariwat will be happy to send copies on CD-ROM to whoever is interested. The title in English is 'Using Dated Chinese & Vietnamese Ceramics for Studying Thai Archaeological Works and Art Styles: A Case Study on 14th-18th Centuries Stucco Decoration on Ancient Monuments in Thailand.'

Essentially Pariwat divides stucco study into 4 periods. In Phase I, about 13th-15th C., there is no stucco, which appears in Phase II (about mid 15th-16th C.) when influences from ceramics are most evident. There is internal evolution rather than further borrowing in Phase III (mid 16th-early 17th C.) and in Phase IV (mid 17th-mid 18th C.) when the fully evolved unique Ayutthaya stucco styles attained their height.

### Ceramics care

Thank you so much for Bonnie Baskin's answers to my questions in your July 2005 issue! I have an interest because of my small collection, and I thought others would appreciate the answers too. I hope you don't mind more questions, for instance: [1] Is light exposure a problem (presumably pieces will fade/deteriorate if exposed to light)? [2] Second, is there an optimal humidity for keeping these pieces, or does it matter?

—Timothy Rebbeck, Philadelphia

Editor: Altogether Tim sent 5 more questions which Ms Baskin has kindly answered. The first three are answered below and the others will appear in coming issues of the newsletter.

Bonnie Baskin answers: Light is normally not a problem, with a few exceptions. Post-fired paint may fade dramatically from light, and I've seen minor fading in deteriorated glazes and the black markings produced by open firing.

About humidity: Humidity is also not a problem, except that ceramics con-

### More on Sunchi

While cleaning the shard with a Chinese mark [shown in June 2005 newsletter], we found another mark on the other side. Can you identify it?

— Sila Tripathi, Goa



Editor: Pariwat Thammapreechakorn, our in-house Chinese reader, had a new look at the original mark. It is not clearly written, but he says the upper character is most likely yong ('forever') and the lower one zhen ('precious, rare.') He thinks the piece is 18th century. See Gerald Davison, *The Handbook of Marks on Chinese Ceramics*. London: Han-Shan Tang Book, 1994. (yong is #64, p. 41; zhen is #122, p. 43) The newly discovered mark looks like a fungus. An example is illustrated in Davison, p. 26, on the base of a Kangxi (1662-1722) period bowl.

### (Ceramics care, continued)

taining critical levels of soluble salts are at risk of spalling as the salts in their pores expand and contract with fluctuations in humidity. Fluctuations may also cause dirt in cracks to expand and contract, since dirt attracts moisture, and this can produce flaking. In short, fluctuations in humidity, more than level (%) of humidity can be a problem. On the other hand, I know of one case in which high humidity in a dim unventilated room caused mold to grow on a pot. As elsewhere. So you need to stay vigilant.

Timothy Rebbeck asks: [3] For shipwreck pieces (even de-salinated ones) are there ways to maintain the glaze? I am careful with them but the glaze is sometimes cracked. Is there a danger that chips may come off? Also, the glaze on these is sometimes rough so they appear to collect dirt easier.

Bonnie Baskin answers: You're right about the problems of rough cracked glazes. I'd recommend asking a conservator to examine them and see if they need consolidation. Consolidation — repeated applications of a diluted archival-quality resin delivered on a fine brush — gradually builds up invisible bridges between cracks and fills voids between flakes of glaze and the clay body. The glaze re-attaches, re-integrates, and becomes stable as well as smoother to the touch.

To be continued next issue.



Vietnamese? In regards to #485 at Hantmans auction [June 2005 newsletter], I see that you

identify it as Vietnamese. Do you have a reference?

—David Reh fuss, Washington, D. C.

Editor: I wrote a little about this later Vietnamese material in the 2nd edition of my book, *The Ceramics of South-East Asia* (1988; reprinted by Art Media Resources, 2000). The identification is based on pieces in the Sarawak Museum. The collection there includes Vietnamese blue & white copies of Chinese Wanli (1573-1619) period ware. From the blue & white, the clay, shapes, decorative style etc lead one to a comfortable identification of Vietnamese polychrome pieces. I meant to write a separate article on this identification, but it's never gotten done. Someone else needs to go there & detail the evidence step by step. There is also at least one piece of the later Vietnamese polychrome in the Bangkok National Museum that is identified as Bencharong ware. Perhaps it was made in the mid 17th century when the Chinese kilns were closed for a time.



### Origins of Bagan thesis available online

Bob Hudson has announced that his thesis, *The Origins of Bagan: the archaeological landscape of Upper Burma to AD 1300*, is available online, courtesy of the University of Sydney, at [http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/adt/public\\_html/adt-NU20050721.144907/index.html](http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/adt/public_html/adt-NU20050721.144907/index.html). His 2004 excavations at Bagan at a site reputed to be the palace of the 11th-century King Anawratha yielded some interesting glazed ware. The underglaze blue fragment from a Vietnamese covered box (right, below) came from his 2nd lowest level. The widest date range for this type of box is circa 1450-1520. Two plain white-glazed bowls, one inscribed on the base with Burmese letters, and a green and white kendi (right, above) were found at the same stratigraphic level. This type of lead-glazed ware is presently assigned to circa 1470-1510. Hudson reviews the evidence for early glazed ware and concludes that, despite the well-known historical reference to a pre-Bagan Fyu city with green-glazed brick walls, which seems to be a mistranslation of a Chinese report, domestic glazed ware does not appear until after the Bagan period. The thesis covers Burmese archaeology from a bronze age to the Bagan period using extensive original field work by himself and other archaeologists. Hudson was not able to find evidence for Anawratha's personal presence at the supposed palace site, but he did find continued occupation from sometime in the 11-13th centuries to 18-19th centuries.



Tran Ky Phuong (Center) with R. Brown & Heidi Tan (right) of Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore, who was in Bangkok for a textiles symposium

### Art and Architecture of Champa

The Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum was delighted to host a lecture on the art and architecture of Champa by former Champa Museum of Sculpture (Danang, Vietnam) curator Tran Ky Phuong on 6 August 2005. Ky (as he is generally known) was on a research trip to Thailand sponsored by the Toyota Foundation (Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchanging Program/SEASREP). This research involves looking at the art and architecture of regional cultures that were contemporaneous with the kingdom of Champa. He seeks shared and borrowed influences between Champa and Funan in present-day Vietnam, Dvaravati and some Srivijaya sites in Thailand, and pre-Angkorian sites from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Thailand he visited important monuments and museums at U-thong, Nakorn Pathom, Lopburi, Sab Champa, and Chaiya as well as Bangkok museums. In addition to his talk at our museum, he gave lectures to students at Silpakorn University and at the Southeast Asian Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University.

### River City August Grand Auction

The latest sale results at Riverside Auction House show that Bangkok interest in Benjarong ware and 19<sup>th</sup> Chinese porcelain is as strong as ever. The auction, which was held on Saturday August 6, 2005, marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the Riverside Auction House. Held regularly on the first Saturday of each month, the auctions take place on the 3rd floor of River City Shopping Center. The August sale each year is generally more lavish than the others. Some 300 prospective buyers attended the afternoon sale. Most were local Thai collectors, but there was also a number of Chinese and Japanese visitors who are a regular feature of the sales, and a sprinkling of Westerners. Altogether 300 lots of ceramics, metal objects and ivories, etc. brought some 20 million baht (about us\$ 500,000), according to Mr. Sanya Nuamngoen, manager of the auction house. The most surprising prices of the sale were for Thai benjarong ware. There was unexpected bidding on Lot 100, a group of miniature benjarong covered jarlets, which started at 10,000 baht and finally sold for 260,000 baht (US\$6,340); and on Lot 210, a benjarong covered bowl, that started at 30,000 and went for 220,000 baht. Otherwise, the meat of these River City auctions is 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese blue and white along with later Chinese polychrome ware, and prices were generally good. The star of the auction was Lot 140, a Chinese vase in Kangxi-style but probably made in the late 19th century, which sold for 330,000 baht (US\$8,050). The vase, Lot 140, is shown at right.



Lot 140, ht 44 cm, 19th C.



### Raman micro spectrometry proves presence of lapis lazuli

Raman analysis of a 13th century Iranian ewer (photo at left), which belongs to the Lajvardina group of blue glazed ceramics, shows that the ultramarine color comes from an unexpected deposit of lazurite-rich slip at the interface between the clay body and the cobalt-colored glaze. This, according to researcher Philippe Colomban, confirms the use of *lajvard* (lapis lazuli) as reported in an old alchemist treatise from the 14th century. Previously, the relevant passage in the text was interpreted as a reference to color like lapis lazuli. Raman spectroscopy is a powerful non-destructive optical technique that can be performed through different devices such as a camera lens, microscope and remote fiber optic probe. Colomban presented his findings at the November 2004 symposium organized by the Société Française d'Etude de la Céramique (see our July 2005 newsletter). Colomban, who works at the French CNRS center, found the same combination of lapis lazuli and cobalt in Islamic glassware. His paper will be published in French in the ceramic society's coming issue of *Taoci* (early 2006), and it can be found in English in the scientific journal *Raman Spectroscopy*, Volume 34, 2003.

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 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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

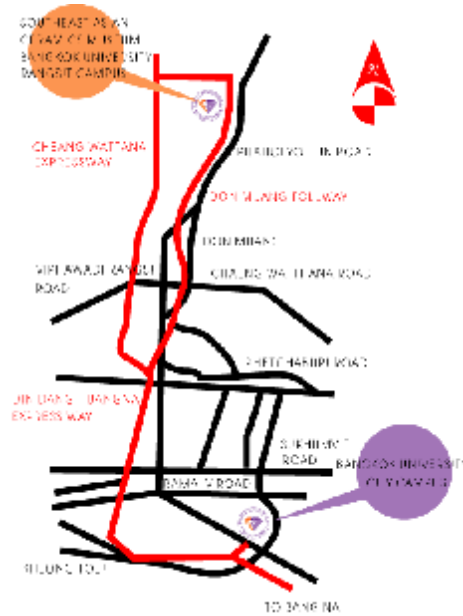
Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

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 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries Tak-Omkoi sites of western Thailand.

The museum formally opened to the general public on 11 May 2005.

## Interior museum views



The displays seen here show (upper left) a variety of storage jars (upper right) an outline chronology for Thai trade ceramics (foreground, lower right) the mixture of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1380-1430.

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

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum  
Bangkok University, Rangsit Campus  
Phahonyothin Road

## New book on Thai ceramics

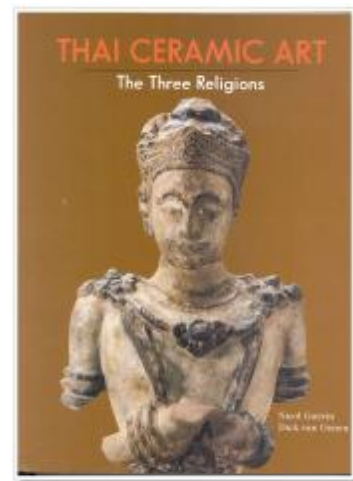
THIS BOOK IS NOT ONLY newly-published, it looks at Thai ceramics in unexpectedly refreshing new ways. It is a hefty work of 10 chapters, including more than 800 illustrations, packed with information and creative, often surprising ideas. It is a work of interpretation in contrast to past inventory-like books on Thai ceramics. And, filled as it is with free-flowing thoughts on the interpretation of the material, it is not surprising that every one of the book's chapters offers grounds for argument. But the idea of making a list of seeming mistakes or weak arguments pales beside the very real feeling of excitement on reading the book. This is a genuine 'page-turner.' Here is the first time a book attempts to fit the ceramics of the Sukhothai kingdom (Sukhothai & Sawankhalok kilns) into the culture and beliefs of that kingdom. The three religions of the title are Buddhism, animism and Hinduism.

Analysis of the ceramics begins with figures that represent (or may represent) religious personages or historical kings. It goes on to propose symbolic meanings for

various popular decorative motifs. Among many other ideas, the authors suggest that Mahayana Buddhism was perhaps more popular than Hinayana because a lotus motif is not as common as the fish motif on Sukhothai ware. They creatively link the 'sunburst' motif on Sukhothai ware to the possible knowledge of opium by showing how it could be made with a dried poppy blossom. Next the authors look at the origin of shapes. They assign covered box and covered bowl shapes to Indian Buddhist tradition. They argue that covered jars are based on Indian reliquary models. Many of the shapes that became popular for export, they say, were probably initially developed as containers for ritual offerings. Groups of ecclesiastical shapes are detailed. Lustration wares (e.g. kendi, ewers) receive an entire chapter, and Sawankhalok figurines are analyzed for evidence of cult use.

There is not space for a full review here or thoughtful or thorough analysis of the many new ideas presented, some of which could be faulted, but let it be clear, this book is above all inspiring. Its given me, for one, many new display ideas that would create excitement.

RMB



Nicol Guérin and Dick van Oenen, *Thai Ceramic Art – The Three Religions*. Singapore: Sun Tree Publishing Ltd. ISBN 981-05-0736-4. Hardcover & dust jacket, 310 pages, with 830 color photos & line drawings. US\$120. Send orders to: Oriental Art Magazine, 300 Park Avenue, 17<sup>th</sup> Floor PMB #1725, New York, NY 10022 USA. Singapore fax: (65) 6737-3190.