



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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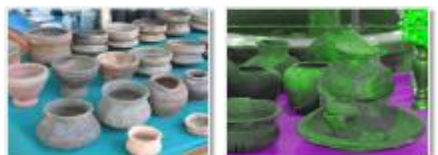
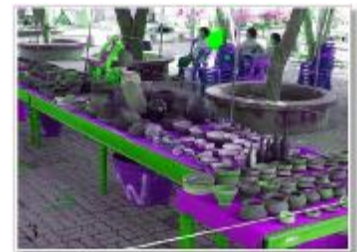
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## Ceramics from Ta Chin river

ALERTED BY A PHOTO-CAPTION story in the September 4, 2005 *Bangkok Post*, a group from the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum visited Wat Thaphut, Nakhon Pathom province. The monastery sits beside the Ta Chin river (1). Divers had been hired by the temple committee to search in the river for antiques, and they retrieved hundreds of earthenware pots, old bottles, and glazed ceramics (3). Parts of two old river boats (2) were also recovered.

During our visit to the temple we decided that the oldest ceramics we could identify belonged to the beginning of the 16th century. Six fragments of Chinese blue & white (e.g. hole-bottom saucer) belonged to the Zhengde (1506-21) reign, and others (4,5) were Jiajing (1522-66). Two celadon bowls (6) and a brown-glazed figurine from Sawankhalok are from about 1500-1550. A single large bowl from Sukhothai (7) with an imitation of an 'ornamental rock in landscape' design from Chinese blue & white of about 1510-30 must also be 16th century. The finds included earthenware and stoneware (8) from the Maenam Noi kilns, Singburi. Most Chinese ceramics were blue & white from the 19th century and later (9). Unglazed shapes included many stoneware mortars (10) and a wide variety of earthenware cooking pots, jars and even stoves (11).



## Letter from the editor

IT GAVE ME great personal pleasure to be able to identify early 16th century ceramics during our group's visit to Wat Thaphut, which is about an hour's drive west of Bangkok. Before the research that went into my PhD dissertation, *The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia*, was completed in 2004, it was almost impossible to be more specific about the dating of Chinese trade ceramics than 'early Ming,' middle Ming' etc, and not everyone agreed on dates for 'middle Ming.' Some began middle Ming with the Chenghua (1465-87) reign, some with the Hongzhi (1488-1505) reign. My research involved proposing a chronological order for shipwrecks in Southeast Asia, and for the 16th century, there are clear differences between ships assigned to the Hongzhi and Zhengde (1506-21) reigns. Hole-bottom saucers, for instance, are common in Zhengde cargoes and not found earlier. The fact that neither the Thai or Chinese pottery from the river is earlier than about AD 1500 adds historical data to the site.

RMB



## Letters to the editor

### Thai Ceramic Art

[In reference to your review of our book *Thai Ceramic Art— The Three Religions* in your September-October 2005 issue] We knew that the suggested reference to King Trailok would be controversial. We would never have thought of doing so were it not for the fact that we had seen the four-face head in the Sawankhalok Museum which clearly belonged to exactly the same set and could only have represented a royal deity. The museum has a single head as well that is an exact match (also with the *ketumala*-form *urna*) and there can be little doubt that our picture represents a symbolic posthumous 'portrait' probably produced in the reign of his second son.

We would also like to share our list of important points in the book:

1. Possible identification of 'portrait' of King Trailok(anath) in Wat Noi Champi, probably commissioned by his 2nd son and successor in the early 1500s.
2. Dating of shards of the same period in a reliquary chamber, Wat Chong Lam, Si Satchanalai.
3. Identification of the early underglaze flower motif as lotus-related and Chinese inspired.
4. Producing the sunburst motif by poppy stamp method.
5. Dating the twin duck water vessel shape.
6. Symbolism and dating of the *ketumala* motif.
7. Identification of 'hunchback' figures.
8. Study and identification of human figurines and heads, head-dresses and costumes.
9. Dating two Sukhothai dishes to circa 1549 on the strength of Portuguese costumes.
10. Dating and identification of Yuan dynasty motifs in early Thai ceramics.
11. Review of pertinent (Indian) motifs, particularly the 'stalk.'
12. Symbolism of cat figurines in relation to birth rites.
13. Identification of musicians and other entertainment figures.
14. Symbolism of spirit figurines, human and anima.
15. Tracing the Fournereau collection and correspondence.

—Nicol Guerin van Oenen

### Jar fragments

Thank you for your newsletter. We have found several sherds which are similar to the Chinese jar [Newsletter, Sept-Oct, p. 2] in addition to other varieties which I attach for your reference. [3 photos right] I would be glad if you could help identify their provenance, period and similarity with other wreck findings. —Dr. Sila Tripathi, Goa, India.

*Editor:* For the time being, our library is short of books on storage jars, but in S. Adhyatman & Abu



Ridho, *Martavans in Indonesia* (Ceramic Society of Indonesia, 1977) there is a section that shows jars with applied buttons. None of the jars exactly match Dr. Sila's sherds, but they do form a coherent group of brown-glaze jars with vertical ring handles, appliqué buttons and sometimes incised designs. They are assigned to the 16th-18th C. although no archaeological data is cited. E. g. No. 65 on page 119 is shown at right.

Readers with more thoughts, please share!

### Appraising ceramics

As you know the Washington Oriental Ceramic Group is holding a members' exhibition at Towson University next spring. The exhibited pieces will be insured for breakage and to do this they need a value for insurance purposes. The 80-some pieces include a sizeable number of Thai (30+), Burmese (2), Laotian (1), and several good examples of Bencharong, Bleu de Hue and Nyonya wares. I suspect, however, that it will be difficult to estimate their value since they rarely appear for sale in Western markets. That their quality is quite high compounds the exercise. I spent a day at the Freer library doing research on the last five years or so of catalogues from Christie's, Sotheby's and Butterfield & Butterfield to learn auction prices.

The results, while unsatisfactory for insurance value, were most interesting and educational. Not a single piece of classical Bencharong, Nyonya, Bleu de Hue, nor any Laotian ware appeared in the catalogues I perused. I didn't see any Khmer pieces either. Lots of Thai Buddhas, a few Northern Thai (Lanna) pieces and a respectable number of Si Satchanalai celadon-glazed deep barbed-edge bowls were available. Large Singburi storage jars often appeared in sales of export Chinese ceramics, particularly single shipwreck auctions. I concluded from my survey that while local market-sin S. E. Asia and I suppose in Japan do

vie for these exotic and less known wares, not so in the West. Northern Vietnamese wares are popular; the fame of the Hoi An Hoard sale and their beauty – blue and white in the Chinese tradition against which the potters of the Red River Delta around Hanoi were competing – clearly have made Northern Vietnamese wares known and admired.

All this is leading up to a request. Where could I get current values for Thai wares and other S. E. Asian wares, e.g. Burmese large storage jars, Nyonya and Bencharong wares? Are there price lists from Thai dealers available? I have googled without success. Any help would be appreciated.

— David Rehfuss, Washington, D. C.

*Editor:* Welcome to the tricky world of appraisals. The quick answer is no, there are no Thai dealer price lists, and no standard prices, every sale is a separate negotiation. So much of the price depends on the condition and rarity of each piece and on how much the buyer of the moment wants it. Pieces in poor condition may be priced at about 20% of the price of the same piece in excellent condition. In the absence of auction prices, an appraiser begins looking online (e.g. Ebay, mingwrecks.com, gotheborg.com, trocadero.com) and contacting individual dealers to ask their opinions and most recent prices.

### Cambodian scholars visit Los Angeles museums

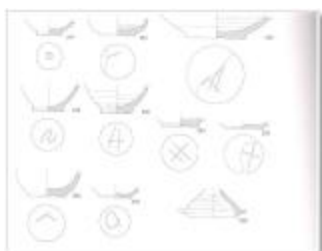
Cambodian scholars Ang Choulean, an anthropologist and former head of APSARA at Siem Reap, and Im Sokrithy, a researcher/lecturer with APSARA, visited three museums in Los Angeles in October 2005. Their host Dr. Robert L. Brown showed them the collections at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where he is Curator of South & Southeast Asian Art. Roxanna Brown (no relation to Robert) joined them for a day's trip to Pasadena where they visited the Norton Simon Museum to see Angkorian sculpture collected mostly in the 1970s, and the Pacific Asia Museum to see Khmer ceramics. Photo at the far right shows Im Sokrithy (left) and Ang Choulean with Dr. Roxanna Brown in front of a Dvaravati Buddha from Thailand at the Norton Simon Museum. The two Cambodians are seen at upper left and again at lower left together with Dr. Robert Brown and Roxanna in the courtyard at the Pacific Asia Museum. They were spending four months in the USA as fellows at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., sponsored by the Carpenter Foundation.



### Shipwreck in Indonesia assigned to 10th century

There has been an updated news report on the shipwreck mentioned in our November – December 2004 issue. An AFP story from 26 October 2005 reports that 250,000 artifacts have been recovered over the past 18 months from a depth of 54 metres. Our own reporter in Jakarta, Willy Atmajuana, tells us that the site is known locally either as the Nan Han wreck, because it yielded rare lead coins from the 10th-century Southern Han dynasty, or as the North Cirebon wreck although one diver says it is closer to a Tegal, a town on the central Java coast. The AFP report focuses on the 14,000 pearls and 7,000 gems recovered, but there is also a significant amount of ceramics including Guangdong ware, Hebei white ware and celadon. The finds also include Egyptian glassware, and there are outside reports of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. The artefacts are being kept in a Jakarta warehouse. A Belgian, Luc Heymans, has been in charge of the recovery together with an Indonesian company, PT Paradigma Putra Sejahtera. It is not yet known how the finds, which represent an investment of nearly US\$6 million, will be sold. When they are sold, Indonesia will receive 50% of the proceeds. Unfortunately, there is no news about keeping representative pieces in Indonesian museums. One quote from Heymans, who is head of a Dubai-based corporation, Cosmix, suggests structural remains although they are not described in the AFP article: "Every piece is indexed and we know which part of the boat it comes from. Every week we sent (the Indonesian authorities) a DVD with digital photographs of all the pieces."

We will publish photos of the finds as soon as they become available. The two photographs at right showing a gold earring with black pearls and a large bronze mirror were found online in an article in *The Epoch Times* and credited to STR/AFP/Getty images.



### Tani kilns field excavation report

Only one Angkorian era kiln site—Along Thom on Phnom Kulen—was known in Cambodia when the Tani site was first reported in 1999. Otherwise there was only the Buriram complex in present-day Thailand. Excavation of the Tani site has been an exciting event in Khmer ceramics research, and it is exciting to receive this beautiful Japanese-language report just as we are finishing this issue of the newsletter. There will be more information on the report, which is filled with illustrations, in our December issue. Meanwhile, the photos here introduce Hiroshi Sugiyama, Project Manager, *Report on the Excavation Survey of the Tani Kiln Site No. A6*. National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Nara and APSARA Authority, Siem Reap, 2005. It is softcover with 54 plates & 108 pages of text & drawings.



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.

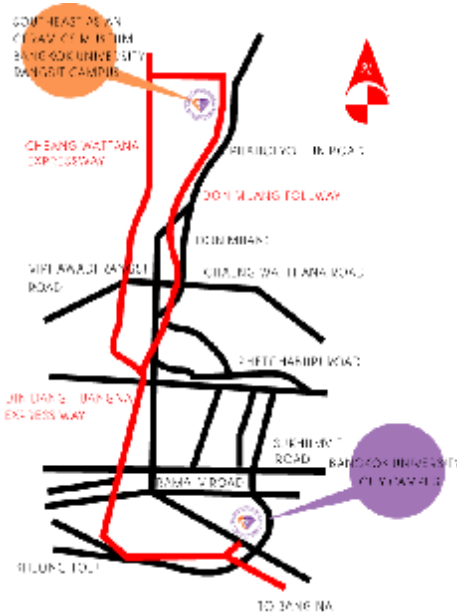
Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

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



## Training course

The Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum is offering a special training course in Thai. The course, *History and Identification of Thai Ceramics*, is scheduled for 12-13 November 2005. It is designed for archaeologists, museum personnel and other professionals, as well as students, guides, collectors, and the general public. There will be practical experience handling actual ceramics as well as lectures on the history of Thai ceramics.

The course will be conducted by Pariwat Thammapreecha, Curator, Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum and author of *Ceramic Art in Thailand*, Bangkok: Osotspa, 1984.

LECTURE: Bob Hudson, 'Otein Taung, an earthenware production site at Bagan, Burma'

10 a.m. Saturday, 26 November 2005  
At Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum

Museum open (except university and public holidays)  
Tuesday—Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## Research bibliography on Chinese Trade Ceramics

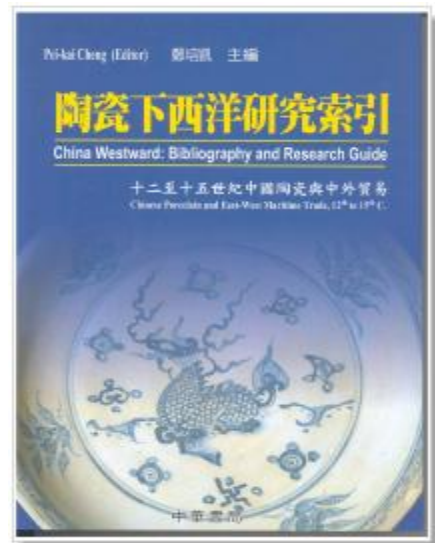
Pei-kai Cheng, chief editor, and Guo Li, Maggie C. K. Wan, Sharon Wai Yee Wong, editors, *China Westward: Bibliography and Research Guide, Chinese Porcelain and East-West Maritime Trade, 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> C.* Hong Kong: Chinese Civilisation Centre, City University of Hong Kong, 2005. ISBN 962-8885-49-9. Biligual, Chinese and English. HK\$118.

THIS PUBLICATION IS PART of a research project at the Chinese Civilisation Centre, City University of Hong Kong, a project that will also be publishing some excellent papers from a symposium that it sponsored in 2004. Entries are arranged by subject matter into seven categories: Archaeological Discovery of Ceramics (sub-divided into geographical sections, e.g. Fujian, Zhejiang), Study of Ceramics, Export of Chinese Ceramics, Chinese Ceramics in Southeast Asia, Underwater Archaeology, History of Navigation and Maritime Trade, and Scientific Testing of Historical Ceramics.

Within each category the entries are listed by date, beginning with the earliest, instead of alphabetically by author. This unusual method gives one a better idea of how the research has been advanced, and if one is looking for a specific author, there is a handy index of authors at the end of the volume. Six indices allow the book to be subtitled a research guide. While all the entries are in English language publications, and extensive Chinese research on ceramics is not included, the volume provides Chinese translations that can be used as a standard by Chinese researchers. The earliest entry is for Fay-Cooper Cole, *Chinese Pottery in the Philippines* (1912-1913).

The cover illustration shows a Chinese dish from the Royal Nanhai (c. 1460) shipwreck, which is in the collection of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum.

The collection of symposium papers, *Chinese Export Ceramics and Maritime Trade 12th-15th Century*, that is also part of the China Westward Project will be published by this year's end.



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