



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

Editors :

Roxanna M. Brown

Pariwat Thammapreechakorn

Reporters :

Augustine Vinh
Berenice Bellina
Bonnie Baskin
Chang Kuang-Jen
Chhay Visoth
David Rehfluss
Dawn Rooney
Eusebio Dizon
Gary Hill
Heidi Tan
Jennifer Rodrigo
Melody Rod-ari
Mohd. Sherman bin Sauffi
Pamela Gutman
Peter Burns
Philippe Colomban
Sten Sjostrand
Timothy Rebbeck
Walter Kassela

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

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Ceramics identification training

EIGHTEEN PERSONS attended the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum's first Thai-language training course on 'The History and Identification of Thai Ceramics' for two days 12-13 November 2005. The group included collectors, museum curators, archaeologists and teachers. The course was taught by the museum's curator Pariwat Thammapreechakorn, assisted by our Education Officer, Burin Singtoaj. It included a mixture of lectures, and handling sessions in which the students learned the difference between the clays, glazes and shapes of the various production sites in Thailand. They also learned the fundamentals of kiln firing from examination of two model kilns on the museum grounds.

Mr. Pariwat is the author of *Ceramics Art in Thailand* (Bangkok: Osotspa, 1984). The certificates of completion were awarded in a small ceremony on Sunday afternoon by Assistant Professor Dr. Boonrod Vuthisartkul, Vice President for Rangsit Campus, Bangkok University.

The lectures were held in the new Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Annex, which was completed in early November. The annex includes new offices, two furnished lecture rooms, an area for ceramics conservation and an entire third floor to be used only for storage. Part of the third will house our growing Ceramics Archive, a collection of site-specific shards for the serious researcher.

More training classes will be held in 2006, both



they will be announced, once dates are set, on the museum's e-mail newsletter list and in the newsletter itself. □

Letter from the editor

IN NOVEMBER YOUR editor attended a planning meeting for a proposed conference that would (depending on funding) be held at Hoi An, Vietnam probably in 2007. The conference would focus on using GIS (geographical information systems) for studies on old trade systems in S. E. Asia. Some members of the group are shown here at the entrance to the Hoi An Trade Ceramics Museum where the door grill (where my hand touches it) shows the 'VOC' symbol for the Dutch East Indies Company that once had an office in Hoi An. Beside me, clockwise, are Caverlee Cary from UC Berkeley, Susan Stone, Berkeley Art Museum; Shih Ching-fei, National Palace Museum, Taiwan; and Tran Ky Phuong, a Champa specialist from DaNang.

Incidentally, in regards to old trade ceramics, there is solid maritime evidence from the time of the Zheng He voyages (1405-24 & 1435) that the primary Chinese trade ware was celadon. A recent National Geographic Channel (Asia feed) program on Zheng He mistakenly cited cargoes of blue and white, for which there is no archaeological evidence in S. E. Asia. An example of a Chinese celadon plate from the beginning of the 15th C. is shown at right. RMB



Letters to the editor

Storage jars, terminology

[In regards to storage jars in the November 2005 issue] Abu Ridho & S. Adhyatman translated *tempayan* into English as 'martavan.' In Old Indonesian language it was written as martaban. It is a large container jar usually used for water, in making salty fish, or as a container for selling goods or foods. Most of them are undecorated and glazed a single colour. We know that they were made in Burma.

A tempayan is a container which is much more expensive and with more decoration. For a long time ago it was highly valued as cultural heritage. E. W. van Orsay de Flines wrote that most probably the word tempayan is from *tapai-an*, a jar for fermenting food or rice wine. Large tempayan were imported into Indonesia at least since the 9th C. They were used also as a container for a secondary burial. Martaban were made later. De Flines never translated tempayan to be martavan. I believe that tempayan were used a long time ago by the Chinese to send their bones or ashes back to China if they died abroad. A very large (1.5 meters tall) Tang dynasty Yue jar from the Batu Hitam shipwreck (9th C.), now kept on Belitung island, is large enough for a man to sit inside. It belongs to the local government on Belitung.

Incidentally, the Indonesian word *buli-buli* has been translated into English as jarlet. But, since jarlets had more important uses in South East Asia than in China, it would be better to call the shape buli-buli. Dutch records mention *boreh-boreh*, and I wonder if that was a mispronunciation of buli-buli. — Willy Atma-

Correction, Chinese entries

Thanks for featuring our *China Westward* bibliography on page 4 of your November 2005 newsletter. In fact the Chinese research on ceramics is included in the bibliography, but it appears in the Chinese entries only.

— Guo Li, Hong Kong

Tha Chin river ceramics

Your description of the ceramics recently found on the river-bed at Tha Chin suggests that this site may have been an anchorage place for Chinese junks ca. 1500 but that it was not a frequented site before that time. If this is the case, it fits neatly into a theory that I am developing for eventual publication. A century later

Tha Chin, continued

(early 1600s) the river bank on the west side at the mouth of the Chao Phraya was used by the Dutch, English and others for fitting out their ships and storing goods for export. The Tha Chin site, much earlier, may have been used by Chinese junk operators, but as part of a different pattern of trade that emerged in the late 1400s.

— Kennon Breazeale, Hawaii

Storage jars

Regarding large Asian storage jars [Nov 2005 issue], their origin is often a mystery as we lack archaeological evidence to identify kilns for many jars found in S. E. Asia, and along the sea routes between South China and the Middle East. For Dr. Sila Tripathi other good references for Asian large storage jars besides *Martavans in Indonesia* include Valdes, Long & Barbosa, Manila, 1992, *A Thousand Years of Stoneware jars in the Philippines*; Barbara Harrison, Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1986, *Pusaka--Heritage Jars of Borneo*; and Lucas Chin, Sarawak, 1988, *Ceramics in the Sarawak Museum*.

In October at the Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Japanese archaeologist Asako Morimoto discussed storage jars collected in Thailand and Vietnam by the Hauges. The jars vary in size, are mostly unglazed and all stonewares. Ms. Morimoto found archaeological evidence in Vietnam and Japan for only a few. Indeed, most do not appear in any of the standard works of storage jars found in Southeast Asia. I have attached a picture of three of the unknown jars in the Sackler with Sackler Curator Louise Cort. [Photograph shown below.]

— David Rehfuss, Washington, D. C.



Louise Cort with unidentified jars at the Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C.



River ceramics

Looking at your recent article 'Ceramics from Ta Chin River,' a couple of thoughts occur to me. First, your article appeared shortly after I gave a talk to the Washington Oriental Ceramics Group on the divers of Ayutthaya, the ones with whom I went diving for ceramics in the early 1980s. Some of the blue and white pictured in your article resemble sherds that I acquired from them. I attach two photos [shown above] similar to several others we acquired. My first question is whether you would be interested in having such sherds for the museum's collection. I cannot tell you much them, other than that they were acquired during 1980-90 and most likely came from the Chao Phya just downstream from its confluence with the Paa Sak River south of Ayutthaya.

My second question: is anyone studying the various rivers that served as commercial highways? River-borne trade must have been extensive before the railways and highways were built. I would like to see the Thai spelling of 'Ta Chin' because one reading of the words would be 'Chinese port' or 'Chinese wharf.' Also, merchants at Chatuchak Market in the late 1980s were selling extraordinarily beautiful blue and white wares they said came from a river (if memory serves, the 'Mae Khlong'). I heard that there were communities of divers there, but I never managed to visit them. I would also love to know whether anyone has looked at the bottom of the river systems that link the Suphanburi and Singburi kiln sites with Ayutthaya. Ceramics from both sites were very commonly found by the divers at Ayutthaya. If you know of any reports on riverine archaeology I would appreciate the references. — Robert Retka, USA

Editor: Yes, DEFINITELY we would appreciate your donations for the museum!

Your memory about the Mae Khlong river is correct. In a half-page notice, Bhujjong Chandavij (*Muang Boran Journal*, 10/2, April-June 1984, p. 30) says

Continued next page, [opposite](#)

Tea bowls at the Freer Gallery

Dr. Katayama Mabi made a trip to Washington, D.C. as a Smithsonian Institution Short-term Visitor to study the tea bowls in the Freer Gallery collection of the type known in Japan as Koraijawan, 'Korean tea bowls.' Some of these bowls were made in Korea for the Japanese market; others were made at Japanese kilns following Korean models. She hosted members of the local ceramics society at the museum to explain recent research in Japan on this little-understood and confusing aspect of 17th century ceramic production of tea bowls in the Freer collection. Dr. Mabi, who has a Ph.D from Seoul National University, found that most of the pieces of Korean tea bowls in the Freer Collection, which were collected from 1896-1906, matched the evidence of Japanese and Korean excavations or other Daimyo collections from the 16th century forward. She went on to say that the Japanese "modern standard" for Korean tea bowls was developed in the 1930s (i.e. based on the myth that they were made by ignorant lowly Korean potters and later discovered by Japanese tea masters as the essence of "teaism"). This standard, however, differs considerably from the new evidence. In fact, Korean bowls for the Japanese tea ceremony were made to order in southern South Korea or later in Japan for Japanese clients.



Bob Hudson on Burmese ceramics

Bob Hudson (PhD, Archaeology Dept., Univ of Sydney) gave a talk at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum on 26 November 2005 entitled 'Otein Taung: a medieval earthenware production site at Bagan, Myanmar.' He described his excavation (together with Nyein Lwin, Archaeology Dept., Bagan) of two large mounds at Bagan (Pagan), known as Otein Taung or 'pottery hill.' The mounds comprise layers of ash, charcoal and potsherds. Radiocarbon dates suggest that the site, an open-field earthenware firing site, operated over six centuries, both before and after the historical (11th-14th C.) Bagan period. The finds include domestic utensils, building materials and religious artifacts.



Otein 'taung: geometric design, "cultural symbols" abandoned?



Shipwreck ceramics theme at River City auction

A display of shipwreck ceramics added interest to the December River City auction preview. The pieces, from the Gulf of Thailand and Vietnam, were borrowed from private collectors and for display only. The auction lots for 17 December 2005 included only a few shipwreck finds. Two lots [photos right: Sawankhalok elephant, sold US\$1875; and Sawankhalok phoenix, sold US\$ 1300] that I guessed might come from the officially unrecorded 'Songkhla' wreck, according to auction director Sanya Nuamngoen, actually came from a seller in Ayutthaya rather than from the usual Pattaya source. There is a story that a single buyer acquired the entire contents of the wreck 5-6 years ago from fishermen for Baht 20,000 or 100,000 (US\$500-2500), depending on who tells the story. What were the contents of the cargo? Mr. Sanya [right with dish] said the large Chinese celadon dish fragment on display is from the site, and that there were large numbers of Sawankhalok underglaze boxes. Similar celadon dishes, all with carved scrolling designs on the face, were recovered from the Lena Shoal wreck in the Philippines. Present evidence supports dates in the early 16th C. for both sites. A Swatow jar with a dragon, similar to jars recovered from the Binh Thuan (circa 1608) off Vietnam, sold for its starting price of US\$500.



Letters, Editor replies continued
the finds came at the beginning of 1980 and, at first, were offered to Wat Ko nearby, that divers from Ayutthaya came, and that the ceramics were mostly Chinese ware from the 13th-14th C. He mentions that glazed and unglazed Thai wares were also found, and that Chinese coins and wood planks from ships were recovered. Malinee Gumperayarnnont also wrote on this subject (both in *Muang Boran Journal*, 10/2, April-June 1984, pp. 31-48, with photos; and in *Final Report SPAFA Technical Workshop on Ceramics (T-W4)*, 1985, pp. 65-84, with drawings). The river lies west of Bangkok, and the first finds were made in Muang district, Kanchanburi province. They were especially concentrated near Wat Ko Loi. She identified the ceramics as Khmer, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese wares from the 10th to 20th centuries, with higher numbers of pieces from the 12th-14th and 15th-17th centuries.



Oriental Ceramics Society of Hong Kong visit

AS PART OF A week-long tour of Thailand that included the Loy Krathong holiday, a tour group from the Oriental Ceramics Society of Hong Kong (photo at left) visited the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum on 12 November 2005. They were shown around the museum by Pariwat Thammapreechorn and local scholar Dawn Rooney.

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 older times from neighboring countries.

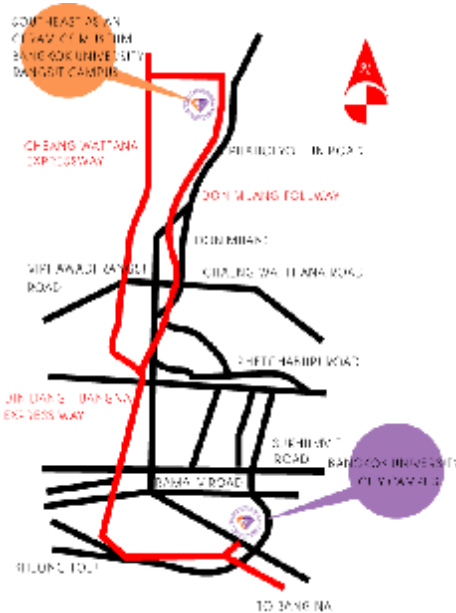
Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

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 14th-16th centuries Tak-Omkoi sites of western Thailand.

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

Interior museum views



Interior views of the museum show (upper left) a variety of storage jars; (upper right) a 5-period outline chronology for Thai trade ceramics; and (foreground, lower right) an open-air 'sandpit' mixture of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1380-1430, with Northern Thai ceramics in the background.

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

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum
Bangkok University, Rangsit Campus

The âk: Cambodia Bird news !

IN A SHORT 3-PAGE ARTICLE in the little-known journal *Cambodia Bird News* (Special Angkor Issue, 2000, pp.17-19; cover shown at right), Ang Choulean throws light on Angkorian period limepots. The single most common and endearing shape in Angkorian ceramics, particularly from the Buri Ram kiln sites, is a small bulbous pot with the attached beak, eyes and tail of a bird. (An example from our museum is shown at near right.) Usually wings are incised on the sides of the vessel which, because it generally has traces of lime inside, is called a limepot. Lime is an essential condiment for betel chewing. In English, the bird is usually described as an owl but this is because no one (including this writer) happened to ask a Khmer who have long called these vessels 'âk,' the Khmer name for the bird depicted.

Once common, the âk is rarely seen these days and the only photograph that Ang Choulean could find for his article shows a captured bird in 1997 (his photo is reproduced at far right). The injured bird was said to be en route to a Thai zoo.

The âk is celebrated in Khmer song and poetry for strict monogamy and for its displays of anguish at the death of a mate. It is said that the bird's inconsolable misery at the loss of a mate will lead it to beat itself to death against a tree or rocks. The âk, which feeds on lake fish and shellfish, is associated with inland waters, and Ang Choulean suggests that the name of the temple that sits on the edge of the Western Baray, where the bird was once a common sight, Ak Yum (literally 'âk in tears'), is derived from the bird. He also notes that lime is made from the crushed shell of the same sorts of shellfish eaten by the âk. Today, even when limepots (usually in silver) are made in other shapes, Ang Choulean says they are still called 'âk.'

Right: Khmer limepot in the shape of an ak. Collection of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum.

