



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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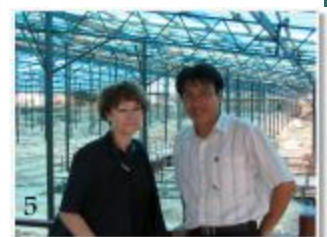
## Ceramics at Thang Long

EXCAVATIONS AT THE Thang Long citadel site in Hanoi have uncovered evidence for some imperial blue and white ceramics in Vietnam. Ceramics specialist and archaeologist Dr. Bui Minh Tri who is Secretary for the Thang Long Imperial Citadel site showed visitors a bowl decorated with dragons round its exterior walls and the mark of an imperial princess who occupied part of the site in the 15th century. Almost all the ceramics have come from one small area of the site, an area where there was once an artificial waterway of some sort. Unwanted ceramics had apparently been thrown away into the water.

The earliest finds are from the late Tang dynasty, about 9th-10th C. The most numerous are from the Ly (1010-1225) dynasty, but there are fair numbers from later times as well. The photographs were taken during a visit by a group of conference-goers from the International Symposium on Geo-Informatics for Historical Studies in Asia (12-14 Nov 2005).

Bui Minh Tri is co-author (with Kerry Nguyen-Long) of *Gom Hoa Lam Viet Nam, Vietnamese Blue & White Ceramics*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2001.

Photographs: (1) Area of densest ceramic debris at the site. (2) An unexcavated corridor. (3) Excavated ceramics from the 11th-12th C. (4) General view of an excavated area. (5) Archaeologist Bui Minh Tri with *Newsletter* editor R. M. Brown. Photographs by Caverlee Cary.



## Letter from the editor

IN ADDITION TO attending the Geo-Informatics conference in Hanoi and visiting Dr. Bui Minh Tri at Thang Long, I also took a trip to Chu Dau village (location of 15th-16th C. kiln sites) to check out stories about modern copies of old Vietnamese ware. Chu Dau today is a lovely quiet village with a large government pottery located on its outskirts with more than a hundred workers. The factory's ceramics are definitely inspired by old styles, but there was no visible attempt at making deliberate fakes. The shade of blue, for instance, does not match old pieces; and sizes and proportions are usually very different. I hope readers will recognize the piece at far right as modern while the one at near right is a genuine antique from about AD 1470-1510. — RMB



## Letters to the editor

### Cambodian âk limepots

It was an honor to have (thanks to David Rehfuss) so much information about the ceramics collections in the Freer and Sackler Galleries appear in the most recent newsletter. I'd like to offer some additional information. It was good to have Ang Choulean's identification of the âk brought to wider attention. After Ang Choulean visited the Sackler and corrected the identification of the âk-shaped vessels in our collection, I did publish this information in my essay on Khmer ceramics in the Sackler Gallery catalogue *Asian Traditions in Clay* (2000, p. 131). The bird's scientific name is *Haliastur leucogaster* and the common English name is white-bellied sea eagle. (Frank Huffman provided the Latin name; Pamela C. Rasmussen, National Museum of Natural History, the common name.)

By the way, *Asian Traditions in Clay* is available online through the Freer and Sackler Shop ([www.asia.si.edu](http://www.asia.si.edu)). Go to the Shop and search by title (it's on sale!). The Collections section shows some of the Southeast Asian (and other) ceramics in the Freer and Sackler collections; we are steadily adding more images.

### and storage jars

Regarding the 'unknown storage jars' in the Hauge Collection of Ceramics from Southeast Asia at the Sackler shown in the photograph, I would be very interested in hearing from people who have seen such jars. When the Hagues bought their 8 jars in Saigon in the early 1970s, dealers told them the jars were 'Cham,' as did Ha Duc Can later. This suggests to me simply that the jars came south to Saigon from somewhere in central Vietnam. All the jars bear applied tiers of string lines around the shoulder and above the base, and two have wavy combing interspersed with the relief lines. The bases show string-cut marks that are neither spiral nor straight (as on Maenam Si Songkram and Lao jars), but gently curved. All the jars have pairs of pyramidal knobs on the shoulders, and one jar also bears applied spiral motifs between the knobs that recall the clay decor on unglazed jars from Si Satchanalai, Sukhothai, and Phitsanulok. They bear either an ash glaze or an iron-ash glaze. A further clue is a jar of related design that Mick Shippen published (*The Traditional Ceramics of Southeast Asia*, p. 55, left) as made

recently in a village outside Attapu, in southern Laos. I have seen a similar jar that was bought in Ubon, having come across the Mekong from Laos. — Louise Cort, Sackler Gallery

### More unidentified storage jars

I would appreciate if you could provide your expert opinions on a large brown glazed jar with 4 moulded dragons chasing 2 pearls motifs and with 6 small animal motif lug handles. This jar was given to me by my father-in-law who found it at a remote village in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. I attach some photographs. The base is concave, and the mouth has limited brown matte glaze. I thank you in advance for your expert opinions and look forward hearing from you. — Lim Lee Seng



Reply from Jakarta: The dragons and the lugs look OK, but I have never seen such a neck shape, although there are many tales about male and female *tempayan*. It could be an imitation made at Singkwang, South Kalimantan. — Willy Atmajuana



Another reply: This dragon jar with a neck bulge (seen in photo) is close to a jar in the Sabah Museum [Barbara Harrison, *Pusaka, Heirloom Jars of Borneo*, Oxford Univ Press, Singapore, 1986, pl. 88] known as *belanga habohot* in Kalimantan and *bazazan* in Sa-

bah. However this type has not been found at excavated sites or on shipwrecks as far as I know so we can only speculate on the date. For the inland people of Borneo, as well as for hilltribes in the Philippines or Vietnam, all the features of jars are important. The bulging neck is one characteristic. In the transcription and translation of a Malay manuscript written in Nanga Kayan (West Borneo) in 1839, details are noted that may change a jar's commercial value. The text, probably written for merchants and collectors, with very precise illustrations, gives names for more than 40 kinds of jars and enumerates the characteristics for main types and sub types. Features in the shape, decoration or the glaze are noted. [ref. Henri Chambert-Loir & Marie-France Dupoizat, 'Les jarres de Borneo d'après un texte malais de 1839', *Archipel*, 66, 2003, pp. 113-160.] For instance, some *belanga* are named *belanga berihit* if the neck has a bulge in the manner of a cracked bamboo. If two bulges, then the jar is called a *rintung* [Chambert-Loir & Dupoizat, op. cit. p. 139]. The design of the dragons is also important, the scales, how the claws are placed, whether or not the dragons follow or face one another, etc. The same attention is given to the lip, if the handles are decorated or not or if they are horizontal or vertical, and so on. Without archaeological data, one can only speculate on the date. In the early 20th C. Chinese potters who settled in Sabah and Sarawak as well as Kalimantan specially to produce jars for local demand, have copied the jars which were valued. It is therefore very difficult to know if this jar is old or rather recent without a close examination. The unglazed mark on the body is done by a clay roll (*boudin d'argile*) used to prevent the jars sticking to each other in firing and to prevent them from moving. I saw this detail on stacked jars before firing at various ceramic factories in Sabah and Sarawak in 1980. — Marie-France Dupoizat, Paris



### The North Star

For your interest, I send a photo of small dishes, d.16-17cms, from the Wanli period. The figure appears to wear a mask or is shown as a devil (*kuei*) with a tail. Most intact pieces have been found in Sulawesi. We call this figure The North Star. According to Peter Lam (Chinese Univ of HK) the figure is *Kuei xing tie dou*, or the kuei star kicking the dipper (North Star). It symbolizes the first successful candidate in the Imperial service examinations.

— Willy Atmajuana, Jakarta



The Tang Wreck ceramics included a group of about 300 stunning bowls with painted decoration from Changsha, also Xing and Yue ware, along with gold & silver vessels and ingots.

### 53,000 more Tang Wreck artifacts in Singapore

The remainder of the Tang Wreck artifacts were delivered to their Singapore buyer, Sentosa Leisure Group, in November. The objects were inspected for any shipping damage during November-December and now they are stored at two locations. The most valuable pieces are at the Heritage Conservation Centre, while the bulk of the cargo will go to Haw Par Villa. An earlier batch of artifacts from the 9th C. shipwreck is on view at the Asian Civilizations Museum where it will stay at least to the end of May 2006. About the middle of the year the company will consider requests from small special interest groups (i.e. museums, scholars) to visit the collection at Haw Par Villa. Ten persons is an ideal group size; send requests to: [tang@maritimesilkroute.com.sg](mailto:tang@maritimesilkroute.com.sg) Sentosa Leisure Group and Singapore Tourism Board plan to set up a maritime museum for the collection but a site has not yet been selected. The wreck (also known as Batu Hitam or Belitung wreck) was discovered in Indonesia in 1998. It is the only Arab *dhow* vessel known in the region. [\*News note: A *Der Spiegel* article of 30 Jan 2006 ([www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,398478,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,398478,00.html)) reports the beginning of an Indonesian investigation into possible corruption in the salvage and export of the Tang Wreck. The new government is also investigating other deals of the old government including the salvage of the 10th-C. Nan Han wreck [our *Newsletter* Nov '05]. Shipping containers with Nan Han material were confiscated and a warehouse sealed. AFP 29 Jan 06.]

### Chinese trade wares no longer lonely for home — shipwreck pottery found in Malaysia goes to auction in China

A Beijing auction, held on 10 December 2005 by China Guardian Auction Company, introduced mainland buyers to Chinese shipwreck ceramics from abroad. The ceramics, with legal export permits from Malaysia, were offered by Sten Sjostrand of Nanhai Marine Archaeology and came from two wrecksites off Malaysia's coast. Within a general sale of antiques from Chinese sources, the shipwreck lots included 150 pieces of kraak ware from the Wanli Wreck (*circa* 1625) and 50 *yixing* teapots from the Desaru (*circa* 1830) sites. A piece of wood from an unknown site with traces of carving, which was intended as decoration but somehow became Lot 1814, sold along with the ceramics for US\$6,100. A brown glazed storage jar encrusted with seashells went for about the same price. The auction house used the shipwreck ceramics from Malaysia as a test of how Chinese buyers might react to export wares, and the response was mixed. As it turned out, the usual denizens of the auction room, dealers, were not big buyers. Most pieces went to collectors who were newcomers in the auction room, and the prices were about the same as when similar pieces sell in Malaysia. The two lots at right went for exceptionally high pieces: Lot 1603, a kraak dish, sold for US\$1,700; and the teapot with seashell encrustation, Lot 1735, brought US\$3,400. An archaeological report and catalogue of the Wanli Wreck artefacts will be ready for publication in a couple months. The artefacts were formally shared with Malaysia in June 2005.



### Modern Vietnamese ceramics

THE FOLLOWING notes on contemporary ceramic art in Vietnam were sent to the Newsletter by Ann Proctor who is finishing up her PhD thesis in art history, University of Sydney. She examines the transition from craft to art.

Photos: Nguyễn Trọng Đoàn, untitled, 1999, h. 30cm; Nguyễn Khắc Quân, *Birds*, 2003, stoneware and wood, h.35 cm. collection of Maj. Ian Brookes; Nguyễn Bảo Toàn, Installation for Wandering Souls Day, Hanoi, 1999.

Doan (b.1942) had his first ceramics exhibition in 1989 with paintings by the renowned artist Nguyen Tu Nghiem. This is believed to have been the first time that ceramics were exhibited as an art form in a private gallery in Vietnam. The exhibition curator was the art historian Thai Ba Van who believed that the art work of both Doan and Nghiem was deeply rooted in the traditional culture of Vietnam.

*Bird* by Nguyen Khac Quan (b.1962) is from an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Hanoi in 2002. It was the first ever exhibition for an individual ceramic artist at that venue. Quan comes from a Bat Trang potters family and studied sculpture at the University of Industrial Fine Art in Hanoi. He works part time at the conservation workshop of the Fine Arts Museum and otherwise produces ceramic sculpture in a studio behind his suburban Hanoi home.

The installation by Nguyen Bao Toan (b.1950) was held in Hanoi at the Exhibition Hall of the Vietnam Fine Arts Association in 1999. It referred to rituals performed for those who die away from home; Toan used this format to remember soldiers who died in the American-Vietnam war. Toan, the first Vietnamese artist to use the installation format, continues to explore multimedia art with exhibitions in Vietnam and the USA.



