



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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## Inside this issue:

Chu Dau Ceramic Factory	1
Letter from the editor	1
Letters to the editor	2
News briefs	3
Vietnamese ceram- ics book review	4

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## Chu Dau Ceramic Factory

Chu Dau village, about 60 kms east of Hanoi, is located in a county that is still called 'Nam Sach' — the same name as shown in Chinese-derived Vietnamese *chu nom* characters on old 15th-century maps of Vietnam and on the famous Vietnamese bottle-vase of the Topkapi Sarayi Museum. Besides a place name, the vase inscription also includes a reign date equivalent to AD 1450. Old kiln sites were discovered at Chu Dau in the late 1980s.

The modern factory was built in 2001 and began production in 2002. The Chu Dau Ceramic Factory is

owned by the Hanoi Trade Corporation and employs several hundred workers, including traditional potters who were brought from around the province. At present the factory exports mainly to Spain and Japan.

Photos show (clockwise from upper right) Entrance to the factory sales-room. Copies of antique wares, including a finished example of the vase being decorated at lower left. Hanoi ceramics specialist Augustine Vinh beside a vase that he autographed on a previous visit. The factory's main kiln. An artisan decorates a copy of the famous inscribed jar from AD 1450 in the Topkapi Sarayi collection.



## Letter from the editor

IT WAS A GREAT HONOR to be able to attend the wedding of two important ceramics scholars in Cambodia. The groom, Chhay Visoth, is an archaeologist with APSARA Authority who has done the most important documentation of the Phnom Kulen Anlong Thom Khmer kiln site to date. Further excavation of that site is in the planning stage. The bride, lovely Chap Sopheara is a ceramics conservator who appeared in the pages of the very first issue of this newsletter in September 2004. The wedding was held in Phnom Penh on 9 March 2006. On that same day the *Cambodia Daily* newspaper reported that the remains of a shipwreck, possibly from the 9th century, were discovered off the Koh Kong coast. By chance I was at the National Museum that morning where Curator Hab Touch had a dozen ceramics from the wreck including Thai Singburi earthenware (mistaken as pre-Angkorian pottery), post-classic Thai celadon, and a Chinese blue & white *qilin* dish, a mixture that can be confidently assigned to about AD 1500-1520. *The bridal couple, along with Ang Choulean and myself, are shown at right.*



## Letters to the editor

### Sodden wood at auction

Did I understand your Beijing auction story correctly? [January-February 2006 issue] Did a piece of wood sell for US\$6,000? — Walter Kassela, Bangkok

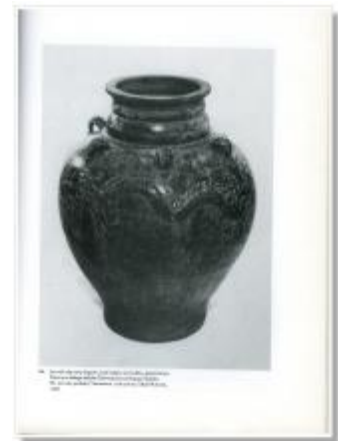
Editor: Yes, and the wood was carved. It's not easy to see the carving but a photograph of the object is shown here. According to Sten Sjostrand, it's about 48 cm long and shows upper and lower carved sections separated with three horizontal lines. The upper part shows a pair of persimmon fruit and the lower part shows a pair of cranes. The wood is pine and has gone through extensive conservation. It was found in a fisherman's trawler net back in 1997, he says, and it's probably from a shipwreck. Pine is used in ship construction in China. It's not sure what part of the ship might have been carved in this way.



### Collar neck jars

In regards to the correspondence on jars [January-February 2006], did the jar illustrated by Harrison also have the bulbous neck lobes? — Karen Lindner

Editor: Yes, a scanned copy of the illustration is shown below right. It comes from Barbara Harrison, *Pusaka, Heirloom Jars of Borneo* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986) Plate 88. The jar from our letters column (Jan-Feb 2006) is shown below left.



## More Pa Yang chronology from Sayan Praicharnjit



Ceramics from the Pa Yang kiln No. 5 excavation, 1983.

Following the visit of Dick Richards (opposite page), we happened to hear that Sayan Praicharnjit had recently been promoted to associate professor at Thammasat University. During a telephone call to congratulate him, he offered some of his memories of the 1983 Pa Yang excavation: "The Pa Yang site, which lies 400-1000 meters north of Sisatchanalai Ancient Town, includes the Tao Yak and Tao Tukhata kiln groups. The first group specialized in guardian (*yak*) figures and other architectural fixtures, and the second made figurines (*tukhata*). Dick Richards and I excavated kiln mound #5. The earliest Pa Yang kilns were brick-built surface kilns (rather than underground kilns). They sat amidst debris that matched ceramics recovered from the Klang Aow shipwreck, e.g. celadon ring-handle jars and covered containers. There was also evidence for a large production of monochrome white glaze. Kiln furniture included tubular supports but none of the spurred-disc type support known at Ban Ko Noi. Slightly later covered containers and especially covered boxes decorated in underglaze black were made in large numbers. There was evidence for brown and white glazed wares and for a variety of underglaze decorated dish shapes and jars. None of this ware had been found at Ban Ko Noi."

[Editor: Analysis of current maritime archaeology suggests the Klang Aow vessel sailed about 1500-1520, and that the underglaze covered boxes belong to the years circa 1520-1560/80.]



Ceramics from the Klang Aow wreck (c. 1500-1520).



#### Shipwreck kraak ware

Rita C. Tan, a longtime ceramics specialist, gave a talk on kraak ware for The Oriental Ceramics Society of the Philippines on 31 January 2006: 'Stylistic Development of Kraak Ware as Evidenced in Three Dated Shipwreck Cargoes: *San Diego* 1600, *Witte Leeuw* 1613, and *Hatcher Junk* c. 1643-46'. She summarized the talk as follows: During the past decades, various dated shipwrecks with kraak ware have been excavated, and comparison of their cargoes provides excellent material for the study of chronological development. The kraak ware recovered from the *San Diego* is important for shedding light on late 16<sup>th</sup> century styles. With a couple of exceptions, many of the early styles of kraak found in the *San Diego* are absent in the *Witte Leeuw*. Although there are no dramatic changes in classic kraak ware from the two cargoes, the *Witte Leeuw* dishes show that there is a slight tendency for the 17<sup>th</sup> C. kraak ware decoration to be more intricate. Finds from the *Hatcher* junk are hard evidence that kraak was produced to the end of the Ming period. There are some new designs such as tulip flowers and 'floating flowers and insects'. The painting in general appears stiff and even sloppy, indicating that the quality of kraak ware production in its twilight years had evidently deteriorated." The talk was originally composed for a symposium on 17<sup>th</sup> century Jingdezhen blue and white ware held at the Shanghai Museum in November 2005.

Photographs: Rita C. Tan giving her talk (above), and a kraak dish from the *San Diego* (1600) that was illustrated in Cynthia O. Valdes, project manager, *Saga of the San Diego (A D 1600)*, 1993.

#### Dick Richards visit

Dick Richards, author and retired curator from the Art Gallery of South Australia, visited us in mid February. Our gallery display of six phases of Thai trade ceramics, with classic Thai celadon production limited to about 1430-1490 caused Dick to recall his first visit to the Sawankhalok kiln sites in the late 1970s: "At the northern end of Ban Ko Noi on the western side of the track leading to the modern town of Sri Satchanalai we saw a long, low mound, perhaps 30 x 10 x 2 m. deep of very high quality celadon shards, partly covered by a bamboo thicket. We were astounded by the quantity and consistency of the material which I see now matches your identification of classic Thai celadon. While elsewhere the path was littered with shards of a variety of wares, it was clear that this one group of kilns was specialised. Nowadays no trace remains of this astounding feature." Dick also recalled his 1983 work with the Thai-Australian Thai Ceramics Dating project: "Sayon Praicharnjit and I excavated a large mound at Pa Yang beside a dry khlong to the north of the 'Yaksa



kilns. We expected to find more architectural ceramics, but did not. Surface finds included undecorated green wares fired rim-to-rim/base-to base, underglaze fish and flower ware, miniature jarlets, celadon dolls, naturalistically painted floral decorated wares, brown and cream incised on the biscuit ware, blue-black glazed ware and a variety of ceramic tiles. Looters had recently dug into the mound but we were able to excavate three partly intact kilns. We found a range of monochrome cream-glazed ware, celadon plates and bowls, underglaze bowls and covered boxes, and a celadon shard fused to an underglaze shard." Photograph: Dick Richards and Lohlan Lee examine 16<sup>th</sup>-century Sukhothai ware at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum.

#### Rewriting Thai prehistory

The original date for cord-marked pottery at Spirit Cave (Mae Hong Son province, northern Thailand) is wrong, says archaeologist Prof Rasmi Shoocongdej of Silpakorn University. An excavation at the cave in 1969 led by Chester Gorman seemed to have identified pottery from 7,500 BP (Before Present). After more recent review of the evidence, however, Rasmi believes it is more likely from about 2,000 BP. Rasmi explains that the pottery excavated in the cave floor probably fell over time from log coffin burials that sit at higher elevations within the cave. The oldest pottery anywhere in Thailand, it now seems, is not more than about 4,000 BP, although human occupation goes back to about 30,000 BP. For Rasmi, a review of the Spirit Cave material was only a beginning. She has been visiting the province regularly since 1998. Her work has included two new excavations (Ban Rai and Thamlong) along with conducting numerous community education projects.

Photograph shows Prof. Rasmi Shoocongdej in her office.



*Glorious Pots, A Millennium of Southeast Asian Trade Ceramics from Maryland, Virginia and Washington Collections* is the title for an exhibition of about 80 pots from private collections in the area. It opens with a lecture by Louise Cort and reception on April 8<sup>th</sup> and runs through May 20. The venue is the newly opened Asian Arts and Culture Center at Towson University in Towson, Maryland. David Rehfuss is guest curator.

Photographs: (far left, above) 17<sup>th</sup> century Arita ware dish made for the Southeast Asian market; (far left, below) Nonya ware bowl made at Jingdezhen for the Straits Chinese of Malaysia; and Vietnamese vase from about 1470-1510.

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

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For enlarged map, go to <http://museum.bu.ac.th>

## Vietnamese ceramics publications

THIS IMPORTANT PUBLICATION on Vietnamese ceramics focuses on domestic glazed stonewares of the Ly (C.E. 1009-1225) and Tran dynasties (1225-1400). The authors describe how these wares were made, list sources for their vibrant decoration, give detailed classifications for each type of ware, i.e., ewers, jars, etc, and include excellent colored photographs of nearly 200 pieces. Most of the illustrated vessels come from public and private Vietnamese collections.

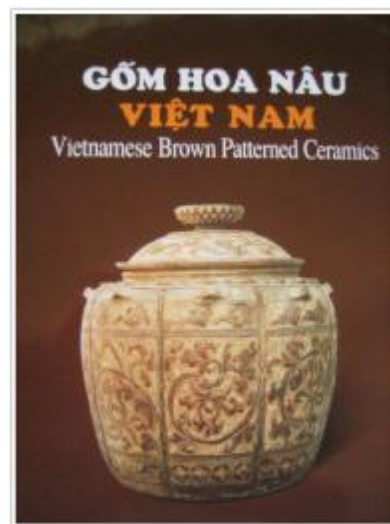
Brown patterned ceramics have brown or ivory glazes decorated with floral, animal and human designs of Buddhist, Cham and Dong Son sources. The patterns were scraped into the body after the glaze had been applied. The bare clay was then painted with iron or white pigments. These wares display Vietnamese potters' skill in painting lively, realistic animals. For example, an urn (plate 84, p. 135) is decorated with two of the most swaggeringly powerful roosters ever painted on Asian ceramics.

Their kilns have yet to be discovered. Their glaze and clay, however, are similar to northern Vietnamese ceramics whose kilns have been stud-

ied. Most pieces have been recovered in northern Vietnam. These wares are closely identified with the Vietnamese cultural renaissance of the 11th-14th centuries C.E. Some scholars, most notably curator Louise Cort of Washington's Freer and Sackler galleries, conclude they were probably made in the Red River delta area, the most fecund region for northern Vietnamese ceramics.

This book is the latest in a string of useful studies of Vietnamese ceramics and culture coming out of Hanoi. Earlier works include *Vietnamese Blue and White (Gom Hoa Lam Vietnam)* by Long and Bui, 2003; *Vietnamese Antiquities (Co Vat Viet Nam)* edited by Lu Tran Tieu, 2003; *The Handbook of Vietnamese Ceramics with Inscriptions from the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* by Nguyen Dinh Chien, 1999; and *Chu Dau Ceramics (Gom Chu Dau)* by Tang Ba Hoanh, 2nd edition, 1999.

Unfortunately for ceramic aficionados, this book has yet to find an international distributor. With Vietnamese ceramics gaining greater attention in recent years, it would benefit the community of scholars and collectors of Vietnamese art to have this and other works published in Vietnam gain wider distribution. — Review by David Rehfuss, President of the Washington Oriental Ceramic Group, Washington, D. C. USA



*Vietnamese Brown Patterned Ceramics - Gom Hoa Nau Vietnam* by Pham Quoc Quan and Nguyen Dinh Chien, Hanoi, The National Museum of Vietnamese History, 2005. 225 pages, 236 color and 50 black and white illustrations and 300 drawings. Text in Vietnamese and English. Size 30 cms x 21.5 cms. Available only in Vietnam.