



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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Inscription by Ms. Bui thi Hy? Possible biography for a most unusual lady

CHU DAU CERAMICS hit the cover of the Sunday *Viet Nam News* on 30 Sept 2007. The famous dated (AD 1450) inscription on a Vietnamese vase in Istanbul is suddenly causing controversy. For the first time the 13 Chinese characters spaced around the vase shoulder are said to contain the name Bui thi Hy, instead of 'Bui thi'.

In the past the characters were read as 'painted for pleasure by Bui thi, of Nam Sach district in the 8th year of Thai-hoa (or Ta Ho)'. The characters are reproduced in R.M. Brown, *The Ceramics of South-East Asia* (1977:19) and also in Regina Krahl, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum* (1986: 527) in a slightly different order. The Vietnam controversy is whether or not the name is male or female. Some Vietnam scholars say that Bui Thi in the 15th C. could be a complete man's name.

The *Newsletter* has not been able to confirm if the order of the characters implies that 'hy' is a name or an adverb ('joyfully').

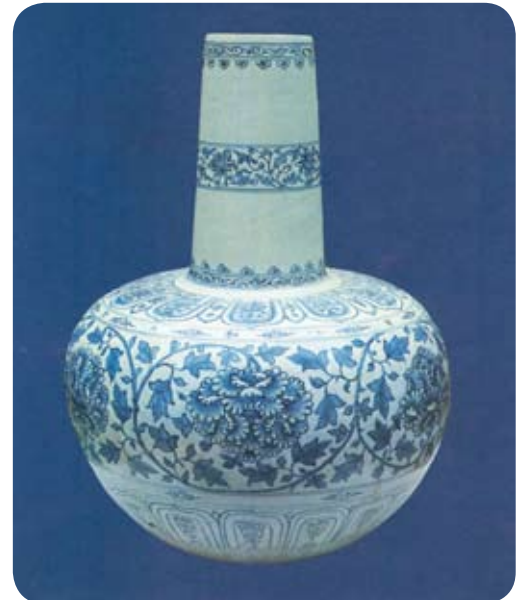
Another concern is the fact that a present-day descendant of a 15th C. woman named Bui thi Hy claims to have found a kiln waster at the site of her kiln which has this carved inscription on the base: "Made by sister Bui Thi Hy, brother Bui Khoi at Quang Anh fief, Gia Phuc district in the first year of Dien Ninh 1454."

The photo is reproduced here [right], and it shows an intact Thai classic celadon plate with abraded glaze. Reached by telephone, an author of the article (<http://vietnamnews.vn.net/vn/showarticle.php?num=02SUN300907>), Ms Nguyen My Ha, confirmed that the plate in the photo is the one with the inscription.

There is no problem about the age of the plate. Archaeology gives a date in the mid 15th C., but archaeology also shows that this type was made at Sawankhalok in Thailand, not in Vietnam.

Characters from the Istanbul inscription:

大和八年南策州匠人裴氏戲筆



Vase with inscription (above), Topkapi Saray Museum, AD 1450, and (below) Bui Duc Loi with inscribed plate.



Letter from the editor

SEVERAL recent news stories focus on Zhangzhou and kraak wares of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Nan Hai II wreck [Sept-Oct 2007, p. 1] with its mix of Zhangzhou and non-kraak (presumably *pre-kraak*) Jingdezhen ware suggests that kraak developed a decade or so later than Zhangzhou ware. Meanwhile, The Wanli Wreck [this issue, p. 4] shows kraak from the 1620s together with pieces that would previously have been assigned to the Tianqi (1621-27) and Chongzhen (1628-44) reigns. New (but still unpublished) finds from the *San Felipe* (1574) wreck [earlier report, Jan-Feb 2007: 1] will soon add more data, and we will review the *Zhangzhou Ware Found in the Philippines* exhibition (now until 16 January 2008) catalogue as soon as it arrives here.

Here at the museum [right], we were proud to host the former permanent secretary of the Ministry of Culture, M.R. Chakrabort Chitrabongs, and some members of the National Museum Volunteers at a 'blindfold' workshop recently. Burin Singtoaj, our education officer, stands at the far end and museum volunteer Walter Kassela stands to the right.

RMB



'Blindfold' workshop

Letters to the editor

Seminar 'Conceptual Ceramics Approaches' in Myanmar

This seminar will be held in conjunction with the opening ceremony for the first ever Ceramics Learning Center of Myanmar which is located at Twante Township. Twante is where members of the Myanmar Ceramics Society (MCS) discovered many old kilns that once produced celadon. Now the MCS would like to invite everyone to participate both in the seminar and the opening ceremony for the Learning Center. Papers could be on any themes on traditional or modern or conceptual style ceramics in Asia. Any presentations would be appreciated by the MCS. The opening ceremony will be on the 21st and the seminar on 22nd of December 2007. Abstracts can be sent to <amthaik@gmail.com> no later than 7th December 2007.

Aung Myo Thaik, MCS

Shipwreck Limepots

The controversy on the type of ship portrayed on the Chu Dau stem plate [July-Aug & Sept-Oct 2007] reminded me about the Cu Lao Cham (or Hoi An) shipwreck. The cargo included the largest quantity of Vietnamese limepots ever found at a single place. Do you know if limepots have ever been found on other shipwrecks?

Nuguyen Xuan Hein, Netherlands

Editor comments: The Butterfields auction included Lot 711 [shown below] with 3 pots with green-glazed handles and Lot 712 with 20 ivory-glazed small and large pots. Collectors say that many additional small ivory-glazed limepots were available at that time on the antiques market. As far as I know, limepots have not been recovered from other ships. Do readers know any?

An online story from Vietnam News Agency (VNA) for 5 Oct 2007, reported that 5,875 additional pieces were recovered from the Cu Lao Cham wreck site by Quang Nam province's Dept of Culture and Information on 2nd Oct. It said "The central province has undertaken several missions and salvaged thousands of Chu Dau ceramics since 1998."



Correction

Concerning the letter 'Where are they now?' [Sept-Oct 2007], there seems to have been a mistranslation for the 2nd limepot. In the article of Clément Huet, the decoration of this limepot is said in the label (p. 80) to be blue: "Fig. 21 - Pot à chaux. Faïence décor bleu. Fabrication anglaise pour l'Annam. H. 1m185. Cochinchine". The article (p. 81) says that the decoration of the limepots from Copeland and Garrett can be blue or polychrome (".. Il reste à signaler les pots à chaux en faïence à décors bleus ou polychrome.... «). So this limepot had blue decoration, not polychrome.

Miriam Lambrecht, Curator Collection India and Southeast Asia, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels, Belgium



Figures in a landscape 1552

Two more shards were found on the beach just north of Port Edward, South Africa. [Sao Joao shipwreck area, 1552; Sept-Oct 07, p. 3] Although they were found some distance apart, I think they are from the same object. It must be a bowl because the larger shard has some underglaze blue on the inside. The hard white body is decorated with figures in a landscape in bright blue cobalt under a matt glaze. The glaze has a distinct light green-blue hue.

Valerie Esterhuizen, South Africa



Underglaze Burmese plate

Editor: In regards to possible writing in the center flower shown [also above] on the Letters page, Sept-Oct 2007 issue, two specialists sent opinions. Don Stadtnr wrote that he had been shown a few long inscriptions on pottery in Burma "but they looked nothing like this." John Shaw, who is familiar with northern Thai letters, was also unable to discern a letter.



Zhangzhou-Jingdezhen mix

At your request, I can confirm the identification of ceramics from the Nan Hai II wreck (Sept-Oct '07) as a mix of Jingdezhen and Zhangzhou wares. Other than the bowls, the dish with a standing phoenix and also the one with twin deer are from Jingdezhen.

Rita C. Tan, Manila [Curator, Zhangzhou exhibition, Yuchengco Museum, Makati]
Editor: Another Nan Hai II photo above.

Proceedings

I want to order the Pei-kai Cheng (ed.), *Proceedings of the International conference: Chinese Export Ceramics and Maritime Trade, 12th-15th C*, Hong Kong, 2005. The Newsletter [Jan-Feb '06] says to order at serice@cp1897.com.hk, but I cannot reach them. Marie-France Dupoizat, Paris

Editor: I apologize. There was a misprint, it should be "service" but our man in Hong Kong Mr Guo Li learned that there is usually no reply anyway. He says: "They said the best way to buy the book from overseas is online at http://www.cp1897.com.hk/. However, the site is in Chinese only, no English. Also, before buying the book, one should become a member of the website (the registration is easy though). Then put the ISBN no. of the book, 962-8885-50-2, into the blank at the upper-right corner of the website frontpage, and pay by credit card. They said there are still some copies left, but not many.

"After talking with the selling company, I finally got someone at the publisher office. They say for overseas purchase, English speakers, please contact Ms Mandy Wong at mandy-wong@chunghwabook.com.hk They will ask for the ISBN and book title."

Guo Li, Hong Kong

Qilin babies?

As a trained marine zoologist/parasitologist and veterinary surgeon, I would like to comment on the birth scene in *The Wanli Shipwreck and its Ceramic Cargo* (#1343, p. 228). [Photo below] I believe the animal is in labor. It is lying down and near the hind hoof one can see a gravid (i.e. carrying young or eggs) fetus out of which grows a flame-like antler. Antlers (not flames) produce circular 'plates' at both sides of the qilin's head. Above its head is a symbol for birth. After-birth products are below the tail.



My opinion is based on a transitional period (1640-60) bowl (d. 28 cms) which unravels the story!

The medallion shows a single creature which carries a gravid uterus (for lack of a better term) from which grows the 'antler'. This is the beginning of the birth process. The exterior design shows Europeans in China collecting strange animals to take back in an ark-like boat. One figure holds an antler and is being given an explanation. The next figure holds a 'plate' which came from the antler and a tiny baby has appeared on the plate. I believe your animal is definitely 'in labour'.

C. Timothy H. Dennis, England



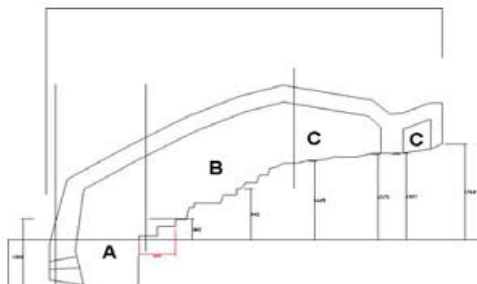
December kiln test

THE NATIONAL CENTER for Khmer Ceramics Revival began construction of a kiln based on the design of the old kilns excavated at Anlong Thom on Phnom Kulen in January 2007 [July-Aug & Sept-Oct 2007]. The plan is to fire the kiln twice a year in an international event. It's a brave plan since no one previously has offered a convincing interpretation of how the original kilns worked.

The first test firing, which is scheduled for December 2007, will be coordinated with a ceramics festival. The kiln will be loaded on 14-15 Dec, fired during 16-23 Dec, cooled for two days and finally opened and unloaded on 29 December.

An international conference on ancient and new Khmer ceramics will be held 13-15 December with a trip to the old kilns on the 13th and then a full day of paper presentations on the 14th (including a review of the 1975 Prasat Ban Phluang excavation by Newsletter editor R. M. Brown). For more information, see www.khmerceramics.com.

Editor's note: In reports from both the teams that excavated at Anlong Thom, Phnom Kulen in January 2007, we received information that "updraft" kilns had been uncovered. I asked the excavators for clarification, since I understand updraft as meaning the fire would be directly underneath any pottery. The excavated kilns show a firebox at one end and a chimney at the other so that the hot air would cross through the pottery. Dr Hiroshi SUGIYAMA, head of the Angkor Project (Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties) which funded one of the excavations, kindly replied that the Khmer kilns are definitely cross-draft and that the Japanese term had been mistranslated.



Kiln drawing: A - firebox B - Steps for loading kiln C - Horizontal chimney

Letters to editor, 'Qilin babies?' continued

The shipwreck qilin and then the ark-like boat on the collector's bowl are shown on the previous page [p.2]. The collector identifies other figures on the bowl as (here, clockwise) a qilin with an antler carried on its saddle, a Westerner carrying an antler, and a Westerner (riding a qilin) holding up a plate with a baby qilin.

Editor: We are looking forward to readers' opinions on these identifications!!



Conservation of a major ceramics collection


ABOUT 900 CERAMICS HOUSED at Wat Reach Bo in Siem Reap—pottery dating from the first millennium B.C. to the 17th or 18th century and representing Cambodian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Siamese, and Lao wares—underwent conservation from July through September by the Ceramics Conservation Lab of Phnom Penh.

Photo below: Conservators Chap Sopheara (left) and Tep Sokha (right), together with Ea Darith of APSARA (second left) are shown conferring with the Abbot, Sr. Pin Sem. The work involved cleaning, stabilizing, and restoring this enormous assemblage of pots.

Acknowledged as one of the largest collections in Cambodia, with prehistoric holdings ranked as the best in the country, the Wat Reach Bo collection is said to have been amassed by abbots, monks, and villagers for 400 years, since the monastery was built. The conservation work was made possible by a grant from a private sponsor in the U.S.A.

News sent by Bonnie Baskin

Right: Rembang shipwreck photos.

In addition to a great many bowls, lesser numbers of covered boxes and ewers in various shapes were recovered. Many of the bowls sold in 2006 in Bangkok for about US\$25 each. 

Rembang (c. 1100) shipwreck

Ceramics that appeared for sale in Bangkok's Chatuchak market beginning about mid 2006 were traced to an otherwise unreported shipwreck off Rembang, Java. But diving seems to have stopped earlier this year -- reportedly because the divers hope to sell the location. Proper excavation would add value to the finds, but the bowls that are most common are not likely to bring the large amount of money envisioned by most shipwreck hunters. So it is possible that this site may quietly disappear into history once again.

According to sources in Indonesia, the cargo offers a range of monochrome ware from Dehua and Tong'an and Longquan-type ware from Pucheng. No remains from the ship's structure are reported. It may have been on a return trip from Quanzhou back to East Java. The ceramics appear to be slightly earlier than the Jepara (c. 1127) cargo. Photographs below.



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum

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 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 14th-16th 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>

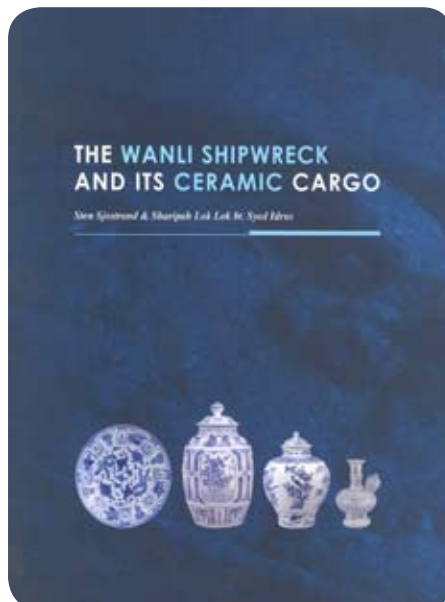
Stunning report sets new standard

AFTER MORE THAN 30 years being pitifully thankful whenever any report at all appeared, and being quietly disappointed by one incomplete report after another, I am ecstatic that this new volume sets a welcome high standard. It is presented in full color, with all the 234 types of ceramics in the cargo documented, an inventory of all the non-ceramic items, description of the archaeology, and a complete account of the ship's structure and the state of its physical remains. Most important, the numbers of each type of artifact are stated or at least estimated. With numbers, many welcome analyses become possible.

The wreck was originally given the site name Wanli by Sten Sjostrand because the jar that led to the search was similar to one on the *San Diego* (1600) wreck from the Wanli (1573-1619) reign. Analysis of the recovered cargo however led to 'about 1625' as a more likely date for the wreck. RMB

P.S. We are proud to say that co-author Sharifa had formal training in ceramics identification here at our museum.

Sten Sjostrand & Sharifah Lok Lok bt. Syed Idrus, *The Wanli Shipwreck and its Ceramic Cargo*. Kuala Lumpur: Department of Museums Malaysia and Sten Sjostrand. ISBN 967-9935-74-4. Order online for US\$58 at <http://www.mingwrecks.com/publications.html>.



Page 126 is shown above. With four illustrations each for two types of bowls, Serial Nos. 6018 and 6105, it shows the thoroughness of the inventory. Tables show the numbers of pieces and dimensions.