



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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Editor:
Roxanna M. Brown

Reporters:

Ang Choulean, Ann Proctor, Augustine Vinh, Berenice Bellina, Bonnie Baskin, Chang Kuang-Jen, Chhay Rachna, Chhay Visoth, Chui Mei Ho, David Rehffuss, Dawn Rooney, Don Hein, Donald Stadtner, Edward Von der Porten, Else Geraets, Eusebio Dizon, Gary Hill, Guo Li, Hab Touch, Heidi Tan, Horst Liebner, Ian Glover, Jennifer Rodrigo, John Kleinen, Leng Rattanak, Li Jianan, Louise Cort, Marie-France Dupoizat, Melody Rod-ari, Michael Flecker, Mohd. Sherman bin Sauffi, Nguen Xuan Hien, Pamela Gutman, Patrick McGlyn, Peter Burns, Philippe Colomban, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Rasmi Shoocongdej, Rita Tan, Sayan Praicharnjit, Shih Ching-fei, Sten Sjostrand, Tim Hartill, Timothy Rebbeck, Tira Vanichtheeranont, Tran Ky Phuong,, Valerie Esterhuizen, Zheng Jin ie

Editorial staff :

Burin Singtoaj
Walter Kassela

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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1st time for excavation finds Han dynasty ceramics in Thailand

Khao Sam Kaeo had already attracted excitement when a shard of 2000-year old India rouletted ware was found in 2005 [Sept-Oct 2005 issue]. During three seasons since then, the site has yielded more evidence for long distance trade including the remains of a bead-making workshop area which employed techniques that must have been imported from India. The early levels of the site have been dated to the 4th to 2nd centuries BC.

Chinese shards expand the site's international connections. The only other reports of Chinese ware this early in S. E. Asia come from Vietnam. Other finds from the excavations and its vicinity (e.g. Sa Huynh culture earring, Dongson drums, nephrite) also relate it to Vietnam.

Ms Sophie Peronnet, a team member and specialist on Chinese ceramics, brought about 20 shards, all from different pots, to show S. E. Asian Ceramics Museum staff. They included both earthenware and thinly glazed stoneware. Altogether some 80 shards were recovered. The same types of pottery are common, she said, in Guangdong province where it has been discovered mainly in Western Han (206-12 BC) tombs. She was en route to review finds in Vietnam. Besides their impressed net patterns, they display distinctive circular seal-like stamped motifs. This is often called 'seal-on-net' design (seen on two shards at right).

Archaeologists have sought – in vain -- to document Han ceramics in S. E. Asia ever since examples were supposedly found in Indonesia in



the 1930s and donated with his collection to the Muzium Pusat by E.W. van Orsory de Flines. Thus far the earliest excavated Chinese ceramics from Indonesia are from the Sui (AD 581-618) dynasty according to Ms. Eka Sih P. Taim of the National Research Centre of Archaeology, Jakarta. Bulk imports of Chinese ware did not begin until the early 9th century.

The present excavations are a collaboration between the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) represented by Berenice Bellina and Silpakorn University represented by Ms. Praon Silapanth, as well as the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and Bureau des Recherches Géologiques et Minières.

Earlier excavations were conducted by the Fine Arts Department (Thailand) in the 1980s. Articles on the site by Bellina and Silapanth have appeared in the *Bulletin d'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (2002, 2007).

Photographs of Han shards from Khao Sam Kaeo supplied by Sophie Peronnet.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE ARE HAPPY to match Santa Cruz shipwreck finds with Twante kiln fragments in our page 4 story. Assorted kiln site fragments are kept in the Pandita Rama monastery at Twante. In the office here we wondered about finding only two shipwreck examples. It is possible there were more, since at least 30% of the cargo is estimated to have been taken by looters. But if there were only ever two, they were probably not trade goods. We wondered if they belonged to crew members and if those crew members might then have been Burmese. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese author of a report on trade at Melaka in 1512-1515, noted that many ships were built at Dagon in Burma and then sailed to Melaka where they were often sold. Perhaps an original onboard shrine with Twante incense holders was still in use when the ship sank after a voyage to China. It would be most interesting if shipbuilding techniques unique to Dagon could be found to identify ships built there. For now, the excavators can say only that the ship was Southeast Asian. RMB

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Burma lost celadon

I wonder if there is further news about Ho-Nar (Sept-Oct 2006), the lost celadon production village about 6 miles north of Mongkung in Southern Shan States? I enclose a photo of my 1978 Shan 5-inch high pickle pot which has a grey body, impressed decoration and greenish celadon ash glaze. It is very likely from Ho Nar.

--Sylvia Fraser-Lu, Washington, D. C.



Fresh water ceramics

I am a diver in Wakatobi archipelago around Buton island just off the southeast Sulawesi peninsula. One day I was diving in a fresh water cave and found ceramics (see BELOW). I took about 50 examples, but there are more under rocks in the cave. Some are in good condition, many more are broken.

I wonder if it is burials? Or if pirates put them there? Or someone stored the ceramics there and the water level changed to inundate the cave? I also found some bones and teeth.

The cave is very close to a beach, only about 50 meters away, but it has fresh water. I was so surprised to find ceramics underneath rocks. Do you have any ideas? -- Imin, Indonesia



Editor: Looking closely at Mr Imin's photos, it seems that the majority of pieces were made perhaps about 1490-1550. I can only guess that the ceramics were put there before the cave somehow became flooded. Readers, please write if you have any ideas about this.

Islamic ware as trade goods?

I was very interested in Zheng Jin le's information on Wanli ware with Islamic inscriptions [Letters, Mar-Apr 2008]. As far as I remember, this is the second discovery of such ceramics in an archaeological context. The first was in Kota Batu, Brunei in discoveries by Dr. Pengeran Karim of Brunei Museum. In my book Chinese Islamic Wares in the Collection Muzium Negara Malaysia, I illustrate a number of plates from the public and private collections. Similar examples belong to the collections of Topkapi Museum in Istanbul and a few other museums in London and Washington, DC.

This newly reported discovery nearby old Banten confirms to me that Chinese Islamic wares, even though very rare, were once trade goods, contrary to my earlier belief that they were made mainly as gifts to well-known or wealthy personalities in the Malay Islamic world.

--Othman Yathim, Chair of Malay Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand [Editor: Another Banten find below.]



Unidentified dish

This broken bowl [2 PHOTOS BELOW] was found by locals when digging around the foundations of the Okdaungmyo pagoda next to the Mingyaung monastery in Yazagyo, an old city on the Kalemmyo-Tamu road, Sagaing district, near the Myanmar-India border. The road is known from Chinese sources to have been on the Yunnan-India trade route from a very early period but no early datable material has yet been found. The reliquary of the pagoda contained items from the Ava and Toungoo periods (about 18th-19th C); these may come from a rebuilding (rather than founding) of the pagoda. Similar sherds were reportedly found at the base of the central pillar of the city.

-- Pamela Gutman, Sydney



Sao Bento - Jiajing (1522-66)

I think I found a Jiajing mark! The shard is from the Sao Bento wreck (1554) and it was collected off Msikaba, eastern coast of South Africa.

--Valerie Esterhuizen, South Africa



Editor: This may be the earliest example of a contemporaneous reign mark on trade ceramics. Reign marks are seen on shipwreck ceramics after about 1500, but they are either 'made in the Ming dynasty' marks or Xuande (1403-24) reign marks (4 & 6-character).

Trouwulan ceramics

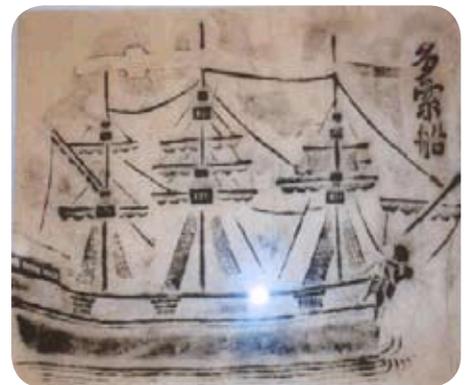
I have enjoyed reading the Catalogue of the Chinese Style Ceramics of Majapahit [review, Jan-Feb 2008]. I have a large collection of Trowulan shards and I can confirm the general absence of Hongzhi (1488-1505), Zhengde (1506-21) and Jiajing (1522-66) ceramics. The authors say (p. 13) "...it was rather powerful at the very beginning of the 16th according to Tomé Pirés, before it finally collapsed in 1527." Yet I believe there is historical evidence that Majapahit was destroyed by the kingdom of Demak in 1478. All the Trowulan palaces and houses were burned. It is notable that Tomé Pirés did not mention the name Majapahit in his Suma Oriental report of 1512-1515.

-- Zheng Jin le, Jakarta

More on ships

I am very much interested in the ship on page 1 [Mar-Apr 2008]. I send an image of a Western style Vietnamese junk from one of the 9 imperial urns cast in 1836. The copper urns are still kept in the Hue Palace.

--Li Tana, Australian National University.



CORRECTION

I wish to correct a mistake in my letter 'Earliest Vietnam inscription' [Jan-Feb 2008 issue]. I mistyped the Gregorian month. The right month is May -- not February as printed.

-- Nguyen Xuan Hien

Tsunami treasure trove

More evidence for an unknown pre-Islamic 'Kota Cina' emporium in northern Sumatra

Margaret Sullivan brought new finds from Aceh's 'Kota Cina' site to a meeting of the Washington D.C. Oriental Ceramics Group this past April 2008. Originally identified by Edmund Edwards McKinnon, who has visited the site repeatedly over many years, the area is believed to have been a trading post sometime in the 11th-14th C. Together with friends, Ms Sullivan discovered a layer of shards newly uncovered by the tsunami of 2005. She brought a basket of shards that included earthenware from India and high-fired Chinese green-glazed and qingpai wares thought to be from the 11th C.



beach. Sullivan thought the little cove she found could not be reached if one had tried to walk along the beach.

The site, she said, is about 5 km down the coast from the ruins of two old Portuguese forts and in the field above the site there are old burial stones. The shards were collected in only 45 minutes from an area less than a half km long.



Espadarte (1558) jar

Wide flat handles a puzzle



WITH PHOTOS supplied by Alejandro Mirabal, a marine archaeologist with Arqueonautas Worldwide, we could identify three of four (unpublished) jars from the Portuguese *Espadarte* as Thai Singburi ware.

Once called the Fort San Sebastian wreck [Christie's Amsterdam, 2004], the *Espadarte* was discovered in 2001 and excavated by Arqueonautas Worldwide but it was not identified until March 2007 when it was finally matched with archive records of ships lost.

The 4th jar [above] is a mystery. Its shape and brown glaze suggest a Thai origin, but the wide flat handles are like those on the black-glazed jars which are most likely to be Burmese Martaban ware, e.g. early 17th C jar excavated in Canada (March-April 2007 issue), and others from Burma (May-June 2007 Letters) and the *San Diego* (1600) in the Philippines.

Has anyone seen anything similar?

The shards were found on a beach and in the water-cut bank along that beach. Most of the shards were found in a single layer in the bank, two to three feet above the beach level. There were some shards on the beach and one or two on the path through the wooded area leading down to the

Vietnam exhibition in Singapore

Viet Nam! From Myth to Modernity will be on view at the Asian Civilizations Museum 21 May to 30 September 2008. It includes many exhibits borrowed from Vietnam's national museums including ceramics from the Hoi An (c. 1470-1512) shipwreck that was discovered off central Vietnam in the 1990s.

The jar shown here (National Museum of History, Hanoi) is one of the finest examples of Tran (1225-1400) dynasty two-glaze jars. Usually the decoration is confined to floral designs. A grave excavated in the 1920s revealed five such jars set in a row. They may have held food and drink for the deceased to enjoy in the afterlife. One example in the *Musées Royaux D'Art et d'Histoire*, Brussels (which also has an excavation photo of the jars in a row) has the Chinese characters for 'wine vessel' written in brown slip on the inside cover of the jar.

For more information on the exhibition, see www.acm.org.sg.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, CONTINUED

Sea battle by Vietnam ceramics artist

It was fascinating to see the ship on a 15th C Vietnamese stem plate [March-April 2008] because the Art Gallery of South Australia has a large plate with a design of two ships in battle. It was published (by me) in *Trade Ceramics Studies*, No.10, 1990.

Jeremy Green (Western Australian Museum) & Pierre-Yves Manguin (EFEO) both examined the plate. Their comments are in the article: Green questioned whether the ships are European, Indo-Arab, S. E. Asian or Chinese but concluded that they are not Chinese or European. He referred to the shape of the bows, the manner of furling the sails, the absence of extended poops and the use of bows and arrows by the crews. Manguin concluded they are S. E. Asian. He noted that 5 masts meant they were large ships, probably built before 1550.

Note that sailors in the bow of the right-hand vessel wield grappling irons and a sailor in the other ship is about to loop a rope between the two ships, the figures are naked above the waist and wear their hair tied back. Two sailors are in the water, one apparently dead, the other about to be swallowed by a large fish as a shark swims nearby. Both ships appear to have prominent European-style ladders at midships but Manguin now thinks they are misinterpreted quarter rudders similar to those on Indonesian ships of the period.

On the basis of the research by both Green and Manguin, I believe the ships and their crews are Southeast Asian.

-- Dick Richards, Adelaide



Detail of plate, Vietnam c. 1500, 36 cm. Purchased with funds from anonymous donor 1984. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

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 within the borders of Thailand. There is pottery from as early as about 3,000 BC and as late as the 19th century.

There are ceramics from pottery 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 the Thailand-based 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 opened to the general public on 11 May 2005.



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



Interior views of the museum
From upper left: wall of storage jars; a 6-period outline chronology for Thai trade ceramics; and three open 'sandpit' displays showing the mixtures of Southeast Asian and Chinese trade ceramics at various dates from AD 1380 to 1550, with Northern Thai ceramics in the background.



Vessels with modelled animal shapes are found at the Twante kiln sites. This type, with a tubular opening for candles or incense, most commonly shows an elephant, horse, and various types of birds. Photo supplied by Sylvia Fraser-Lu. Santa Cruz shipwreck pieces (far right) in National Museum, Manila.

Burma ceramics identified on Santa Cruz shipwreck

Twante kilns to Philippines

TWO UNUSUAL ceramics with modeled animal figures were excavated from the Santa Cruz shipwreck in the Philippines. The excavation was conducted in 2001, and an inventory of the ceramics is now being prepared by Bobby Orillaneda from the Underwater Section, Archaeology Division, National Museum, Manila. Originally unidentified, the pieces are now assigned to the Twante kilns of Burma on the basis of related fragments collected at that kiln site. They are thought to be incense holders. One of the Santa Cruz figures appears to be a water buffalo with circular motifs that may represent painted spots. The other is a horse which is so encrusted with sea grit that it is difficult to tell if it might also include human figures.

The shipwreck also yielded a number of Burmese

celadon plates. Similar plates were also recovered from both the Lena Shoal and Brunei Junk wrecksites. All three cargoes have been assigned to Hongzhi (1488-1505) reign.

Some 11,500 ceramics altogether were excavated from the site, and about 8,000 are intact. An unusually large portion of the ship's hull was also intact.

