



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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Editors :

Roxanna M. Brown

Pariwat Thammapreechakorn

Reporters :

Augustine Vinh

Bonnie Baskin

Eusebio Dizon

Maung Myo

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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Earliest China-built ship in the Philippines

SINCE THE LAST issue of this newsletter, when a wrecksite was reported near Unisan in the Philippines, the Underwater Archaeology Section in the Archaeology Division at the National Museum together with the Far Eastern Foundation for Nautical Archaeology, Inc. have made a report on their initial investigation at the site. The authors are Eusebio Z. Dizon, Eduardo Bersamira, and Leo M. Batoon.

Dr. Dizon kindly sent a copy of the report, which is entitled 'Field Report on the Unisan Underwater Archaeological Investigation, November 8-13, 2004.'

As mentioned previously, the site was heavily looted before the archaeological team arrived. (The team learned through interviews that the looting had actually gone on for the past two years.) The only artifacts seen by the team comprised 34 broken ceramics, 6 flat bars of lead, 1 ivory bangle, and one metal slug.

None of the corroded Chinese iron wok cooking pans were brought to the surface.

Past estimates on the age of the ceramics, which are celadon and monochrome glazed wares, ranged from the 12th to 15th centuries. This report seems to favor a date in the 14th-15th centuries.

Judging from photos of the Chinese ceramics, I would guess maybe mid 14th century. It is difficult to tell if S. E. Asian ceramics are present or not. If the ship did sail in the mid 14th century, then it is the earliest China-built ship so far documented in Southeast Asia. An initial sketch of the Unisan site is extremely valuable.

The identification of pine wood in the sketch favors construction in China.

There is a pointed bow, and there was perhaps also a flat transom stern and axial rudder, but this could not be verified in the brief survey.

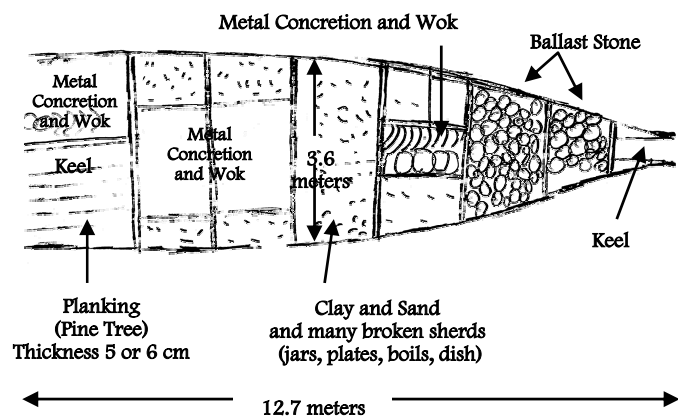
The report recommends a resumption of the investigation that ended in the face of a typhoon.

Even though the cargo has already been looted from the site, the authors believe more of the vessel itself could be excavated from the mud.

They were not able to verify, for instance, whether iron nails were used in the construction.

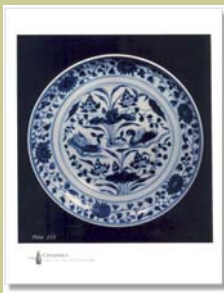
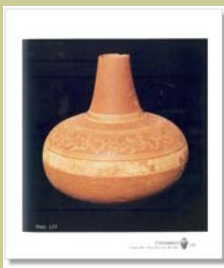
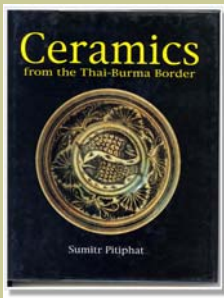
Further collection of broken shards from the site would also give more evidence for a better estimate on age.

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Letter from the editor

There is still daily news about the affects of the December 26th tsunami in Thai newspapers. By sheer luck Dr. Ian Glover who was visiting Phuket and had recently helped make our first museum training courses a success survived. He happened to be on a boat trip to the Simian Islands and unknowingly rode over the wave. The boat operators did not notice anything unusual either – until they reached their island destination and were shocked to see the geography of the beach was totally changed. On return to the mainland, Ian discovered his bungalow gone but he managed to make it safely back to Bangkok that evening. Elsewhere, the premises of the Maritime Archaeology Unit at Galle, Sri Lanka were destroyed. See <http://cf.hum.uva.nl/galle>. The one guard who was there for the weekend managed to grab onto a tree as he was swept away and so survived. The archaeology unit had recently excavated the Avondster(1659) and was due to begin a program on survey and management of maritime sites at Galle in January 2005. The 9th century archaeological site at Takua Pa, a district near Phuket that was partially inundated, apparently was not flooded by the waves. R. M. Brown



Sumitr Pitiphat : CERAMICS FROM THE THAI-BURMA BORDER. 7.5X9", 190 pp., 115 plates, hard cover with jacket, 2003. ISBN 974-91468-4-1. Overseas US\$58 (airmail) Price in Thailand Baht 1,600. Send a postal money order, postal bill of exchange, or cheque payable to Pariwat Thammapreechakorn at Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Bangkok University, Rangsit campus; Khlong Luang, Pathum Thani 12120 For more information, e-mail Pariwat.f@bu.ac.th

Plans for a sherd library in Singapore

THE NATIONAL University of Singapore Museum announced in late November that it seeks donations for a sherd library.

The plan is to have sherd collections from all types of archeological sites in S. E. Asia. The facility will be open to students and scholars, both local and international.

The museum is willing to pay the cost of packing and shipping. Address inquiries to Prof. John N. Miksic, S. E. Asian Studies Programme, NUS, Singapore 117570. Email: cfav2@nus.edu.sg

Editor: Sherds are an essential research resource, and donations are also welcome at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum. Anyone who may have carried fragments away from important sites, please note!

In order to illustrate their value, a Chinese sherd from the river at Ayutthaya, Thailand is shown at upper right. This single sherd testifies that some very rare mid



15th century blue and white ceramics came to Thailand at least as early as the Chenghua (1465-87) reign. This is a significant finding since volume Ming blue and white exports did reach S. E. Asia until the Hongzhi (1488-1505) reign.

From the highland Tak-Omkoi burialsites on the Thai-Burma border, no Chinese blue and white ware has so far been documented for about 130 years from about 1352 (when Yuan dynasty blue and white production seems to have ended) to 1487.

This sherd, with underglaze decoration similar to a dish from the Pandanan shipwreck

(c. 1470) in the Philippines, and body structure similar to a dish from the Royal Nanhai (c. 1460) wreck off Malaysia, appears to be pre-Hongzhi, or about 1460-1470.

Similarly important finds are known in Singapore which regained centuries of lost history when Yuan dynasty blue and white sherds were excavated near Empress Place, for instance.

Sherd collections from documented sites can be even more eloquent than written reference works.

Photos: the Ayutthaya sherd above, Pandanan wreck dish lower left, and Royal Nanhai dish below.



News Briefs

Vietnam Ceramics Study Group

A CERAMICS STUDY GROUP was successfully launched within the organization Friends of Vietnam Heritage. The first event, held in October 2004, was a lecture by Augustine Vinh, a ceramics scholar and collector. The talk, *'Vietnam's Shipwreck Ceramics,'* was held at Mr Vinh's home in Hanoi (see photo). Some 30 persons enjoyed the presentation.

A second gathering in November introduced maritime archaeologist Count Nikolaus Sanizell of Arqueonautas Worldwide with a talk entitled *'Salvaging Antique Ceramic Cargoes from Shipwrecks.'* January 2005 activities included a walking tour of the pottery village Bat-trang on the outskirts of Hanoi.

For information about events organized by the Friends of Vietnam Heritage, which includes the activities of the Ceramics Study Group, email fvheritage@hn.vnn.vn or Ms Ming Hung Frey at hungfrey@fpt.vn The Friends of Vietnam Heritage is a non-formal group of international residents in Hanoi whose purpose is to enjoy and enhance their understanding of Vietnam's culture and history. The ceramics study group is investigating ways of formalizing itself as a separate entity, and Mr. Augustine Vinh will keep us informed about the progress.



'Hunt for buried treasures'

THE ABOVE HEADLINE appeared over a one-paragraph story, byline Rangoon, in the 4 November 2004 *Bangkok Post*. The entire article read as follows: 'Burma plans to next year begin retrieving cultural treasures that have been buried under riverbeds for centuries, a local journal reported yesterday. Foreign experts will train people from Burma's archaeology and water resources departments in underwater archaeology skills next year, and the hunt should start soon after, Flower News said. AP'

Of course we had to know more! At our request a reporter from the Myanmar Times, Mr Maung Myo, interviewed U Hla Gyi Maung, director of the archaeological department at Rangoon University.

U Hla Gyi Maung explained that an archaeological field school, which plans to open in 2005, will teach units about underwater archaeology and exploration. If the students successfully completed the courses, he said, the department maybe (just maybe) able to undertake underwater efforts in the future, but there is no set timeframe in mind.

Mr Maung Myo also talked to the personal secretary to the Minister of Culture who said there was no plan of any kind to undertake excavation of this nature at the present moment or in the near future.

Epaulette from prehistoric Cambodia

This intriguing ceramic artifact with iron horns comes from an excavation by Dougald O'Reilly at Phum Snay, Cambodia. Six similar pieces were recovered. Two have a full set of iron horns such as seen in the photo, a third has traces of iron, a fourth has bands of what appears to be resin for attaching a horn, the last two do not show traces of an attachment. Two additional examples were excavated by Sok Keo Sovandara at a similar site, Kra Snag Thmei, about 15 kms away. Dr O'Reilly says they were found at the shoulder of skeletons, and this is the reason for calling them epaulettes. The object could be at the left or right shoulder, but so far two have not been found in a single burial.

Looking closely, one can also see that the objects appear to be cut from the shoulder of high-fired earthenware pots. The Phum Snay archaeological site is provisionally dated to AD300-600, but the types of prehistoric pots from which the epaulettes appear to be cut could be much older.

If this strange artifact had appeared only on the antiques market, it would probably not be accepted as genuine. At the moment articles on the sites are being sent for review and there is an on-going wait for C-14 dates. In the meantime there is a short notice by O'Reilly, Excavations at Phum Snay, Cambodia, in the *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 24/2 (2004): 129-132.

Photograph by Ms. Fich Thyda, a conservator of the Ceramics Conservation Lab in Cambodia who cleaned the intriguing object.



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.

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.

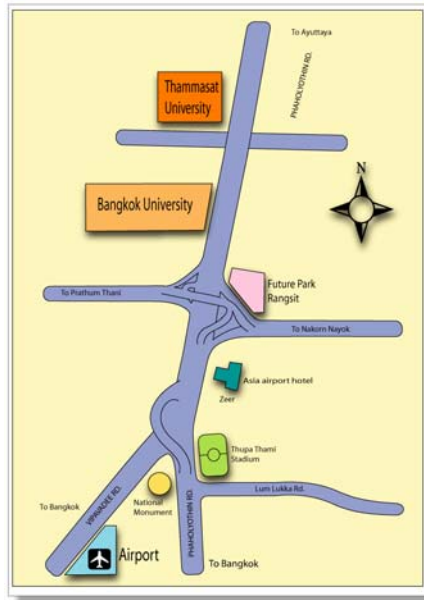
Display galleries show all the types of ceramics found in Thailand and the technology involved in local Thai production. The museum collections include kiln site wasters and fragments that are essential for teaching ceramics dating and identification.

The Museum will open to the general public in early 2005. Visitors are welcome in the meantime so long as they contact us beforehand.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum
Bangkok University
Rangsit campus
Phahonyothin Road
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(66-2) 902-0299 x 2892

Interior museum views



The displays seen here show (upper left) a variety of storage jars (upper right) an outline chronology for Thai trade ceramic (lower right) the mixture of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1400.

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

More news briefs

Unisan wreck, continued from page 1.



These photographs are reproduced from Eusebio Z. Dizon, Eduardo Bersamira, and Leo M. Batoon, *Field Report on the Unisan Underwater Archaeological Investigation, November 8-13, 2004*. National Museum, Manila internal report, January 2005.