



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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## Reports of sunken ships in recent news

THREE different pre-Ming shipwrecks have been in recent news in Asia, one each in the Philippines, in Indonesia, and off southern China.

The Guangdong, China site was already investigated in 2003 when about 4,000 artifacts were recovered in a small scale excavation. Its site name is Nan Hai I. The Chinese assign the ship to the Song (960-1279) dynasty. After seeing newspaper photos of some of the ceramics, I thought it was likely 13<sup>th</sup> century.

An online article from the 14 December 2004 China Daily (<http://china.org.cn/English/culture/114855.htm>) says there are plans to recover the entire ship for museum display. Altogether Mr. Wu Jing, the archaeologist in charge, expects the cargo to include some 60,000 to 80,000 Chinese ceramics. The recovery work will begin "before 2006."

Meanwhile, in Indonesia where underwater archaeological discoveries are never straightforward, the AFP (18 November 2004) reported

the arrest of a team of Western divers at the site of what is presently called the 'Five Dynasties Wreck.' I quote directly from the AFP report: "With items expected to fetch millions of dollars in European auction houses, the work has become embroiled in a murky dispute between the divers and Indonesian authorities over who will profit from the sub-aquatic swag.... It seem to be one of the largest boats containing ceramics ever found, said Luc Heymans, the European-funded project's Belgian director.... So far some 60,000 of 160,000 items have been retrieved and placed in a hangar in Jakarta, according to the divers. They are likely to remain there until the dispute is settled."

FINALLY, there was a one-paragraph story 'Sunken wreck found' filed by the AFP and printed in the *Bangkok Post* on 19 November 2004. This site will be called the Unisan (a town on Tayabas Bay about 135 km southeast of Manila) wreck. The mayor of

Unisan reported that the wreck was 12<sup>th</sup> century. In answer to an email query, Dr. Eusebio Dizon, head of underwater archaeology at the National Museum, Manila provided further information:

"Unfortunately the site was extensively looted before it was reported to the National Museum. The looting probably went on for a month before the museum was notified, so most of the good artifacts were gone. I was able to visit but was not able to dive. Nevertheless I saw some wooden planks of the bulk head, remnants of iron cauldrons, and a number of celadon and stoneware sherds that suggest a Song-Yuan date. There were no fragments of blue and white. According to the divers, the wreck is about 30 meters deep on a muddy bottom. Jean-Claude Robaud, a French diver with Franck Goddio at FEFNA, was able to dive and drew a sketch of the wreck. It is estimated to be 15 meters in length and 5 meters wide. I will be writing a full report on this soon." RMB

## Letter from the editor

THINGS HAVE been busier here recently, so instead of two monthly newsletters we are sending a combined November-December 2004 issue. With it we send our greetings for the holidays.

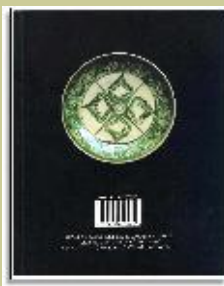
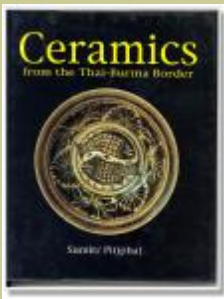
The museum offered two training courses in November and December, both designed for staff from the National Museum at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. See photographs on page 4. Six staff members from Kuala Lumpur completed a one week course in introductory museology, and another six members then arrived for two weeks study on the identification of trade ceramics. The staff members will be involved with the documentation of a shipwreck off Malaysia and registration of the artifacts recovered from the site. It is the 'Wanli' wreck that was introduced in our newsletter No. 1. Although a fisherman's catch of a jar that matched one recovered from the *San Diego* (AD 1600) in the Philippines led to the search for the 'Wanli' site, other finds suggest the wreck belongs to about 1630-1640. The Wanli reign was 1573-1619. The Department of Museums and Antiquities, Malaysia, is planning an important book on the shipwreck, while research continues to pinpoint a date for its demise. For more information, see [www.mingwrecks.com](http://www.mingwrecks.com). The square-sided bottle with a Portuguese coat-of-arms shown here suggests the ship might have been Portuguese.



Roxanna M. Brown

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## Book Review



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  
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Dick Richards, editor, *Lost for 500 years...Sunken Treasures of Brunei Darussalam*. Sydney: Art Exhibitions Australia Limited, 2003. A\$30 plus postage from Art Exhibitions Australia, P.O. Box N222, Grosvenor Place, Sydney NSW 1220 Australia.

THE SULTANATE OF Brunei, so very well known for its rich petroleum deposits, was fortunate indeed in the discovery of an ancient shipwreck on 24 May 1997 by an oil company, which subsequently funded a successful underwater archaeological expedition. The site belongs to about AD 1500, and the 13,500 artifacts recovered consist mainly of trade ceramics along with 1461 metal objects, glassware items, and organic remains.

The finds were earlier presented in the 3-volume 2001 exhibition catalogue edited by Michel L' Hour, *The Sunken Treasures of Brunei Darussalam, an Underwater Archaeological Adventure* (Paris: Editions Textuel) or (French edition) *La Memoire engloutie de Brunei*.

The present catalogue was published to accompany a smaller exhibition that has traveled from the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney (2003-2004) to the National Museum of Australia, Canberra (2004) and Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle (2004-2005). In addition to about 500 objects, mainly ceramics, from the wrecksite, the exhibition includes items lent by the Brunei Museum such as a brass cannon, Dayak beads, and Malay embroidery.

This new catalogue, which seems to be designed mainly for bilateral public relations, does not fill in omissions of information from the original Paris publication nor add significant new scholarship, and yet it introduces the material in a pleasing format to an audience that may one day ask more penetrating questions about the site and material. The wreck is significant for instance for yielding a

dish base with the earliest reign mark known from a documented archaeological site but the original catalogue has no description or photograph of the face of the dish on which it appears. Reign marks, one might argue if all the evidence were documented, are not found on Chinese trade ware before 1500, so it would be nice to have full information about this important site. Another wreck from about the same period (Lena Shoal) did not yield reign marks. The most likely date for the Brunei wreck may be 1500-1520.

The Brunei wreck is the most important discovery in Brunei's archeological history and clearly shows the importance of Brunei as one of the leading maritime trading kingdoms in the region at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The excavation itself was begun with modern state-of-the art diving equipment and techniques and performed by a multinational, multidisciplinary team under the direction of Michel L'Hour. Unfortunately, storms cut the excavation short and the search will not be renewed any time soon. Diving was done at a depth of more than 60 meters under hazardous conditions, and no remains of the actual ship.

The catalogue features two articles providing historical information on Brunei's role in maritime trade and South China Sea trade and shipbuilding. The first article, 'The Brunei Shipwreck and its contribution to Brunei's maritime history,' was written by Pg Dr Karim Pg Haji Osman, Curator of Archeology, Brunei Museums Department. A brief history of Brunei prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is presented, including the origin of the name, exchanges of envoys and missions to and from China, and the historical position of Brunei as a vassal state of Majapahit. Then Brunei's history in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is discussed with emphasis on its relationship with China and its expansion into a fairly large empire rich in natural resources, especially camphor.

During this latter period the Sultan of Brunei controlled trade and commerce, built a powerful naval force, and amassed vast wealth. This history is supported by the evidence of the shipwreck as well as land sites. The similarity of ceramics discovered at Kota Batu, the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century capital of Brunei, to those found at the wrecksite strongly suggests the ship was bound for Brunei.

The second article, 'Trading networks and ships in the South China Sea,' written by Pierre-Yves Manguin of the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, discusses the two primary maritime routes from China, and summarizes current thinking about the origin of South China Sea trading ships. The western route went from South China to the Malay Peninsula and beyond, ultimately leading to the Middle East. The eastern route went from the coast of Fujian to the Philippines and Borneo, with Brunei in a central, strategic position on this route. Chinese products to Southeast Asia included trade ceramics, silk, and cast iron goods. The principal Southeast Asia exports included gold, tin, spices, and a variety of forest products.

The discussion on the origin of the trading ships plying the South China Sea includes a description and historical summary of the Chinese, Southeast Asian, and hybrid South China Sea shipbuilding traditions.

A map shows the presumed route of the Brunei vessel coming eastward from the lower coast of peninsular Malaysia, but probably it had made a stop in Thailand since 1,200 Thai Singburi storage jars were recovered among the 12,250 Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese (misidentified as Thai) and Chinese trade wares. A basic inventory of the recovered ceramics, with numbers of the various types of pieces, that would reveal relative amounts of ware from the various sources, would be a welcome addition to data from this site.

W. Kassela

News Briefs

For those who have not seen it – check out [www.shawcollection.com](http://www.shawcollection.com). Well known to researchers and collectors in Southeast Asia, John and Pat Shaw have been collecting trade ceramics since they lived in Indonesia in the early 1970s. Recently their daughter Pim wrote the slick software program for this site, which presents their ceramics as well as lacquerware, silverware and other collectibles. The site includes a 'bookshop' with a number of interesting publications by John Shaw including, of course, his essential book Northern Thai Ceramics.

If anyone is interested in acquiring the software for a similar site of their own, please contact John Shaw via the web-site. He would also like to hear from other collectors who may want to link their sites.



PREHISTORIC BANGLES WORKSHOP

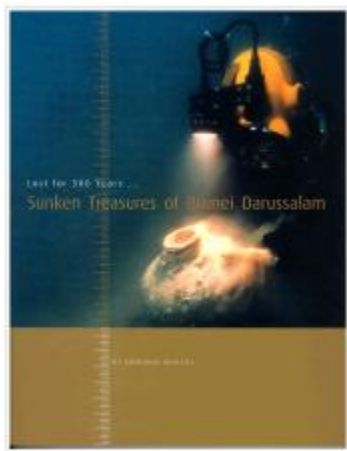
After Mr. Thanakorn Keawkhem, an employee of Bangkok University, found fragments of an unfinished stone bangle and numerous cores near his home in Amphoe Muang, Petchabun province, he brought a selection of the objects as a donation to our museum in June 2004. The donation comprises five disc-shaped cores and one partial bangle incompletely extracted from the surrounding stone matrix. One core appears to be granite, while the other pieces are slate. In size, the artefacts range from 34 to 90 mm in diameter. Their thickness varies from 4 to 24 mm.

Similar stone bangles are known from prehistoric archaeological sites from about 2,500 B. C. to 500 B.C. There is a display of examples recovered from graves at the Lopburi National Museum. Bangles in the same shape made from other types of stone and cut from giant clam shells are also found in prehistoric graves. Mr. Thanakorn said that there were many more fragments on the mountainside where the children of the village play with them.

The incomplete bangle shown at the far right is still attached to a circular core. Apparently the bangle portion fragmented during the cutting process and the entire piece was then discarded. Since the fragments do not include a complete bangle, an illustration of an intact example from Phra Pathom Chedi National Museum, Nakorn Pathom is shown in the lower photo. The museum is most thankful to Mr. Thanakorn.



Book Review continue





## 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 will open to the general public in early 2005.

## Interior museum views



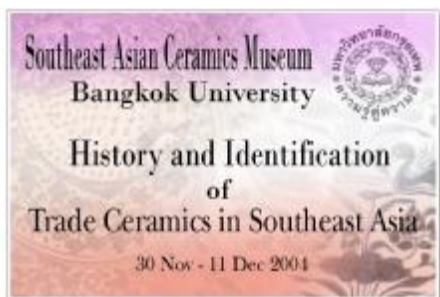
The displays seen here show (upper left) the variety of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1400, (upper right) the Chinese Yuan-dynasty blue and white ware that inspired both Southeast Asian and later Chinese ceramics, (middle left) unique works of art, and (lower right) the variety of ring-handle shaped jars.

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

## More news briefs



Museology Course 22-27 Nov 2004. Form left; Mohd. Khairill Bin Jemangin, Roxanna Brown, Nurhanisah Binti Ahmad, Eyo Leng Yan, Mohd. Razaimi Bin Hamat, Kiew Yeng Meng, and Marina Binti Ismail (Photo taken at: Jim Thompson House on 22nd November 2004)



History and Identification of Trade Ceramics in Southeast Asia 30 Nov-11 Dec 2004. Form left; Mohd. Muda Bin Bahadin, Khairul Fahmi Bin Md. Jahrom, Mohd. Sherman Bin Sauffi, Roxanna Brown, Mohd. Syahrul Bin Ab. Ghani, Sharipah Lok Lok Binti Syed Idrus, and Nor-mazlin Binti Kamsin.