



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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Volume II Number 2 March-April 2005

Tang wreck sold to Singapore

THE SENTOSA LEISURE Group confirmed in a press release of 8 April that it had raised funds to buy the Tang shipwreck collection, and the deal was made in February 2005. The funds were provided by the Khoo Foundation, Singapore. The *Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter* has not been able to obtain the sale price, but over the past several years the asking price for the collection was informally said to be about US\$40-45 million.

The seller is Seabed Explorations Ltd founded by Tilman Walterfang who resisted continuous offers to split the collection or sell it piecemeal at auction.

The Tang shipwreck artifacts, about 60,000 items altogether, were discovered and excavated in 1997/98 off Sumatra in Indonesia. The site has also been called the Batu Hitam or Belitung wreck. The collection is unique for numerous reasons. Attributed to the 9th century, the shipwreck ceramics are the earliest so far known in Southeast Asia. The sailing vessel itself is the only *dhow* from the western Indian Ocean so far found in Southeast Asia. The site yielded the only shipwreck Changsha ceramics so far discovered in S. E. Asia, as well as artifacts and

solid bars made from silver and gold. One Changsha bowl is inscribed with a date equivalent to AD 826.

Working closely with the Singapore Tourism Board and other government agencies, the Sentosa Leisure Group has long-term plans for a new public facility coined the Singapore Maritime Silk Route Museum. In the meantime, highlights from the cargo will be on view at the Asian Civilizations Museum from 15 June to 31 July 2005.

Right: Changsha bowl & solid gold cup, Tang wreck cargo.



Sunchi Reef, India: This photo comes from Dr. Sila Tripathi at the Marine Archaeology Center, Goa who asks for a date for the shards, which come from a probable shipwreck site. Please send opinions to us at museumnewsletter@bu.ac.th

Letter from the editor

THE BEST NEWS, the most exciting news for the moment, is plans for the soft opening of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum on 11 May 2005. About 100 invited guests will join the celebration at the museum at 3 – 6 p.m. There will be three speakers, the president of Bangkok University, Thanu Kula-chol; director of the museum, Roxanna M. Brown; and the founder of the university, Surat Osathanugrah, who donated the primary ceramics collection. From 12 May the museum will open five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday, 9 – 4 p.m. Also, on 14-25 June, the museum will be offering a training course on museology with 3-hour lectures each morning and research trips to local museums every afternoon. If there is any interest in joining this course, please let us know. Our May-June 2005 newsletter will be a special issue celebrating the museum's opening. R. M. Brown

Warrior elephants of Sawankhalok

NOTING THAT that one of six ceramics included in the stunning *Kingdom of Siam* exhibition (Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, 18 February – 8 May 2005) is a Sawankhalok warrior elephant, it is worth emphasizing the rarity of this type of large figure.

Three elephant figures (shown right) recently entered the collections of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum. All three are brown and white glazed and 37-40 cms in height. All three have a *mahout* and a rider on the elephant's back, and two also have a warrior at each of the elephant's legs. Unfortunately, the head of only one rider is intact (at right, below). Sometimes parts of the four warriors are also broken away.

Our search for other elephants with all the human heads intact made us realize the scarcity of such elephant figures. In fact, we could find only two other genuine examples in S. E. Asia: one from the Australia Tide shipwreck, and another in the Museum Pusat, Jakarta. The riders' heads on the Jakarta example appear to be restored, and those on the Australia Tide elephant are missing. The human



heads on the Asian Art Museum example are restored.

Our three elephants are from the same site, an undocumented shipwreck in the Gulf of Thailand informally called the Aow Thai site. Sawankhalok elephant figures are documented from three shipwrecks: the Aow Thai & Australia Tide, with brown & white glazed pieces; and the Brunei Junk, with an unglazed example. All three wrecksites belong to the approximate time period 1500-1520. (See R. M. Brown, *The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia*, PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2004) Thus shipwreck evidence, at present, suggests a short production period of perhaps only two decades.



Left: Ea Darith and Chhay Visoth, archaeologists with APSARA in Siem Reap, examine fragments of Southeast Asian and Chinese ceramics excavated at Sakai, an old port site on the outskirts of Osaka. Ea Darith presented data on seven newly discovered kiln sites in Cambodia, and Chhay Visoth described the ceramics made at Anlong Thom on Phnom Kulen, so far the oldest known site for glazed ceramics in Cambodia.

New Perspectives on Khmer Ceramics, international conference, 5 March 2005, sponsored by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Nara



SOME 900 Chinese & S. E. Asian trade ceramics amassed in the 1960s by a former diplomat, the late John Allen Tabor, will be sold at auction on 14 May 2005. See www.hantmans.com

Ceramics conservation in Cambodia

THE STAFF OF the Ceramics Conservation Lab in Phnom Penh – Chap Sopheara, Tep Sokh, and Pich Thyda (pictured left to right) and Bonnie Baskin – worked for six weeks from January 3rd this year to conserve 20 pots excavated by the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient (EFEO) at Siem Reap. The pots came from burials and domestic pits at the pre-Angkorian site of Prei Khmeng, which has been dated to about AD 100-650. The project, co-sponsored by the EFEO and Friends of Khmer Culture, includes another six weeks of conservation work later in 2005. A report on the site will be completed soon afterwards.



Coming study on the Sukhothai kilns

GARY HILL FROM La Trobe University Bendigo (Australia) visited the museum in mid-April after returning from a field trip to Sukhothai to collect data for his doctoral thesis on the working of the Sukhothai ceramics industry. As a practicing potter, Hill will naturally emphasize the state of the technology at Sukhothai. During this latest research trip, Hill identified three (and possibly four) new cross-draft kilns at the main group of kilns at the northeast end of the Mae Chon moat (Wat Phra Phai Luang). This brings the total number in this group to at least 13, with the possibility that more would be discovered with further excavation. Hill also noted that, while cross-draft kilns in the main group were constructed of pre-fired brick, at least one kiln located at the north wall location used raw brick, as did the later cross-draft kilns at Ban Ko Noi (Sawankhalok/Si Satchanalai). After close inspection of remains previously identified as up-draft kilns, Hill has decided to argue that they lack features essential to up-draft kilns. His analyses of the kilns, and his personal search for in-ground kilns at the site, will add interest to the thesis he hopes to complete in early 2006.



MARCH 2005: The Wanli wrecksite ceramics brought together two research teams, one from the Jingdezhen Ceramics Institute (JCI) and the other from the Maritime Archaeology Museum (MAM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Shown at left (left to right): Samsol bin Sahar, head, MAM (based within the National Museum, Kuala Lumpur); Ms Luo Yifei, a graduate student at JCI who is studying Kraak porcelain; Ms Sharipah Lok Lok Binti Syed Idrus, assistant curator, MAM; and Prof. Cao Jianwen,

Malaysian team visits Jingdezhen



lecturer and adviser to graduate students, JCI. Above: Sten Sjostrand, head of Nanhai Marine Bhd, who directs the Wanli wreck research, examines shards from one of seven Jingdezhen Kraak sites discovered in the last 10 years. The group from Malaysia spent five long productive days with Prof. Cao and Ms Luo visiting the Kraak sites from early morning to late at night. Cao and Luo have submitted an article on the sites to Oriental Art magazine.

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.

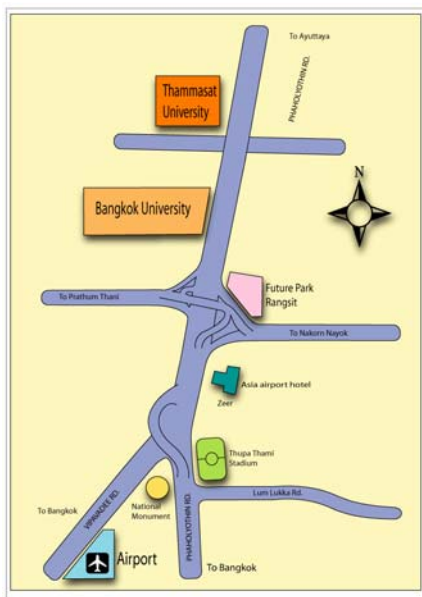
Khmer ceramics from old kilns presently located within Thailand are represented. There are also Vietnamese ceramics, a great variety of Chinese ceramics, Burmese, Lao and Japanese ceramics.

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.

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 will open to the general public on 11 May 2005.

Interior museum views



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

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

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More news briefs

The *Ontario*, Yankee clipper ship, 1799

THERE IS INTERESTING news about the remains of cargo from an American ship, the *Ontario*, that was en route from Canto to New York when it struck an uncharted reef in the Karimatta Strait, Indonesia in a gale in 1799. In early January this year Mr. Paul Martino sent email from Australia to a number of persons in this region saying that, after two years search in the early 1990s, he had discovered the ship's final resting place. On the day the site was discovered, however, Martino became ill and had to call off operations. He says only two persons knew the exact location of the final resting place. When he was finally able to return to the site in 2004, valid research and recovery permits in hand, he discovered that the cargo had been stolen. Local sources said they had seen a salvage vessel in the area within the past year. "We are offering \$1,000,000 reward," he wrote, "to anyone who can put us onto the party responsible, as we intend recovering what is ours, a cargo we had official license to recover under specific terms and conditions."

The area of reef impact is apparently fairly well known to divers in the region, but no one else has publicly reported finding the actual vessel which apparently drifted off the reef and sank further south.

Mr. Martino sent the two photographs of ceramics recovered from the impact site shown here. He says the cargo originally contained some 22 tons of Chinese ceramics, and that about two tons were spilled at the impact site. His email is uc_da_loi@optusnet.com.au



Dishes said to be recovered from the area of original impact where the *Ontario* struck the reef and was holed, spilling large amounts of ballast and cargo.