



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

Volume III Number 4

July-August 2006

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‘Hands On’ Identification

An ‘Introduction to S. E. Asian Ceramics’ workshop was held at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum during 2-23 May 2006 for 12 enthusiasts from the National Museum Volunteers of Bangkok. The group met for 3-4 hours on Tuesday mornings for informal ceramics handling, a formal lecture, and tours of the museum gallery and storeroom. Each of the group also prepared a 10-15 minute talk of their own.

One highlight of the workshop was a surprise visit by museum founder Surat Osathanugrah who talked about his collecting and his long term interest in trade ceramics.

The group learned basic identification, including how to distinguish earthenware from stoneware; the differences between monochrome and underglaze decorated ceramics; how Thai celadon differs from Chinese celadon etc. Altogether they handled Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Burmese and Khmer ceramics ✓



Left: Else Geraets, who organized the workshop together with Dr. R. Brown, chats with Bangkok University vice-president Boonrod Vuthisatkul. Below (left to right) are study group members (1) Richard McCall, (2) Miriam Jamieson, (3) Alison Butts and Birgit Lorenz-Meyer and (4) Ira Benney.



Top: Patricia Habberjam (standing to right of Nancy Rundhammer) gives a talk on Sawankhalok celadon. Above (left to right) Susy Barry, Siew-Eng Koh, Barb Maidelis, Miriam Jamieson and Birgit Lorenz-Meyer walk through the museum gallery with Dr. Brown.



Letter from the editor

AFTER OUR RETURN from the Zheng He trip to Qui Nhon [this page May-June issue], I received the interesting letter reprinted here on page 3 about an unknown early chapter in research on Champa ceramics.

Back in Bangkok, our museum hosted a study group from the National Museum Volunteers (NMV) who wanted to learn enough to guide visitors through the ceramics collection of the National Museum. At right, Else Geraets, who organized the workshop, presents me with a gift book in appreciation. A similar workshop may be organized for sometime in September-December, and I will try to announce it early enough in the Newsletter so that those who might be interested could quickly join the NMV and attend. The group especially enjoyed the handling sessions and trips into the museum storeroom. ✓ RMB



Letters to the editor



Dish in Burma

I photographed this dish in Tagon Daing village, about 7 miles south of Twante. Can you tell me the age? There was no information about its find spot or provenance, but it is on display in a small temporary museum that honors three early bronze Buddha images. The images, which were discovered in the village in May 2005, have become a major focus of pilgrimage. I attach a photo of one of them. - Don Stadtner, USA

Editor: The dish is Chinese blue and white trade ware from the Jiajing (1522-66) reign. [Bronze shown below.]



Naga, makara, heru?

We were fascinated by your article on *makara* (May-June 2006, p. 3). Mr. Tu opens an interesting subject that we have not (yet) fully explored

Naga, makara, heru, continued but will do so once we finish our current ceramic project. Meanwhile, our comments follow.

Practically all Thai ceramic literature refers to the two illustrated objects as '*makara*', whether with or without a naga emanating from the mouth. We have never seen them referred to as '*heru*'...

The *makara* played an important role in South Indian and Sri Lankan architecture and appears in moonstones, balustrades, waterspouts and especially *torana*.

In the *Rupavaliya* (v. 148) it is described as 'possessing the trunk of an elephant, the feet of a lion, the ears of a pig, the body of a fish living in water, the teeth turned outwards, the eyes like Hanuman's and a splendid tail'.... The three-headed version clearly links it to the ceramic monumental Airavata elephant figures....

To combine the *naga* with the *makara* could, presumably, have been a Thai invention, inspired (and misinterpreted) by the Sri Lankan or South Indian architectural Yali feature (see attached copy of a drawing)....

Sri Lanka *torana* commonly feature a spray of vegetation that connects the central *kirtimukha* with two *makara*. The same design can be seen in the southern stucco pediment of the eastern laterite tower of Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai....

The original Indian *makara* lacked the two horns, but these may have been added in Thailand as an afterthought perhaps when the antelope became an element in Varuna worship. [In Vedic mythology the *makara* is a symbol for Varuna.] *Naga* is also a term for the elephant, hence the trunk!

It would seem to us that the *makara/naga* combination need not have been an adversary one but that the serpent part simply reinforced the protective character of this architectural feature. Combined they are believed to be associated with the sun, lightning and rain.

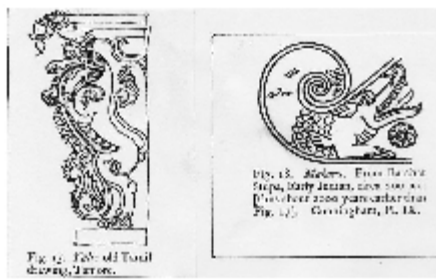
Although the idea was undoubtedly Indian-inspired, we do not discard some Chinese influence, as the Thai builders may well have been aware of Chinese ceramic roof-architecture.

We have taken another look at the *makara* in our own collection. Those from Si Satchanalai are generally larger than the ones from Sukhothai, with many of them produced in two separate fitted parts (we only have the top sections). Those without a serpent emanating from the mouth usually have a ball-shape or a (vertically) flattened disc-like object inside the mouth....

We are interested in learning of Mr. Tu's reaction, and would like to keep in touch with him after his return to Vietnam. ▽

Naga, makara, heru, continued

The accompanying illustrations [shown below] are taken from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, figures 15 and 18. — Nicol Gaurin-van Oenen and Dick van Oenen [authors, *Thai Ceramic Art, The Three Religions*, reviewed in our August 2005 issue]



More from Sunchi Reef

During a recent exploration on the same Sunchi Reef off Goa, we have recovered a few more shards of Chinese ceramics. Can you identify them? Thank you,

— Prof. Sila Tripathi, Goa



Editor replies: With help from our museum curator Pariwat Thammappreechakorn, we suggest the following identifications. For what appears to be the flattened rim of a plate at upper left, we have not ourselves seen anything similar, so we have no comment. Continuing clockwise (upper right), this fragment appears to be blue & white from Guangdong province, early 19th C. The next (footrim) piece is from the Dehua kilns of Fujian province, mid to late 17th C., Kangxi reign; then a smaller fragment from the same kilns but from the late 17th to early 18th C. The last (lower left) fragment is too small for accurate identification, and we note only that the solid blue band is somewhat similar to the solid blue flattened rim on saucer dishes from the Tek Sing (AD 1822) shipwreck cargo.

CORRECTION: On this page of our May-June 2006 issue, we incorrectly wrote the name of Edmund Edwards McKinnon. For bibliographies, incidentally, the family name is Edwards McKinnon, without a hyphen.

New private museum in Bangkok
 HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn formally opened the new Bangkok Insurance Museum on the 31st floor of the Bangkok Insurance Building at 25 Sathon Tai Road on Thursday May 18, 2006. Most of the exhibits are Thai trade ceramics, with many cases filled with high quality rare Sawankhalok, Sukhothai and northern Thai ware, but there are also stunning examples of Khmer stone and bronze sculpture, prehistoric bronze objects of various sorts, and historic bronze weights and measures. More than 1,000 objects are displayed in an exquisite setting. A catalogue entitled *Bangkok Insurance Museum* published in honor of the opening, written by Bhujjong Chandavij, features full color photographs and a bilingual Thai/English text. The museum is now open to the public 10 a.m. to noon Monday through Friday, with no admission fee. For more information, call (02) 285-8509. ✓



Letters to the editor, continued

Search for Zheng He visit to Qui Nhon
 First of all, let me introduce myself. I am Nguyen Vinh Hao, a collector and owner of the Gosanh-Binh Dinh Ceramics House located at 173 Le Hong Phong, Quy Nhon, Binh Dinh. The house is a kind of family museum with more than 200 objects on display. My collection includes about 2,000 objects. Recently, I read an interview with you in our local newspaper. I am sorry that I did not have a chance to meet with you during your visit to Binh Dinh. [See May-June 2006 issue, page 1.]

I would like to give more information about the Go Sanh kilns that you might not know. My father, Nguyen Huot, who was born in 1926 in Binh Dinh, used to own a ceramics studio which produced glazed pottery for export. He was also a collector. In the 1960s he managed to collect a number of old Champa ceramics, which were however not identified at the time. Then, in February 1974 many shards were unearthed by the US bombs in Go Sanh area. My father went there and discovered the old kilns which were the source of objects in his collection. He sent a notice to the Institute of Archeology in Saigon, then held a press conference in Saigon to announce his findings. He has stated that the Gosanh kilns produced celadon wares in the 14th century. *Viet Tan Xa* (the Vietnam Press Agency) published this in the *Chinh Luan* daily newspaper of March 2, 1974 (I found the original). This evidence affirms that my father, Mr. Nguyen Huot, gave birth to the term Go-sanh ceramics. After the press conference, Mr. Nguyen Ba Lang, a leader of the Archeology Institute, asked my father to take him to Go Sanh to do a survey. In September 1974, he published an article on the

Gosanh kilns in the Archeology journal in Saigon. Unfortunately, due to the escalation of the war, this issue was not widely circulated or read, and then it was forgotten.

The objects in our family museum can be divided into four groups — religious objects, royal ceramics, trade objects (including overseas trade and inland trade objects), and popular objects used by the people. They belong to the 11th—18th centuries. ✓

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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>

More shipwreck finds from China coast

Porcelain from the Donghai Pingtan Wreck at Wanjiao Site No. 1.
Peking: Science Publishing House, April 2006. In Chinese. RMB 320.



The catalogue includes a foreword by Zhang Wei, Director of the Department of Underwater Archaeology at the National Museum of Chinese History. Zhang introduces the Wanjiao Site No. 1 wrecksite, its artifacts and the historical implications. There is a summary of the recovered porcelain by Li Jianan, Chief of the Archaeological Institute at the Fujian Museum. The site, located off Pingtang Island, Fuzhou of Fujian province, was excavated during 13 July to 15 October 2005. The pottery includes underglaze blue; underglaze blue with red enamel; polychrome; underglaze blue and green-glazed; and imitation Geyao kiln ware; etc. A total of 145 pieces are illustrated. [This information provided by Li Jianan.]



In addition to the above information from China, Goodwin Li of City University Hong Kong adds: I haven't completely read the book but I know that it introduces a large scale underwater excavation. I heard that the wreck was found last June, and that it had been looted before the excavation began. The finds are mainly Qing porcelain of the Kangxi (1662-1722) reign from 300-350 years ago. The dig (at least for part of the excavation) was broadcast live on China Central TV last September according to news. ✓