



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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## Ca Mau shipwreck (c. AD 1723-35)-8th from S. E. Asia, Asia, 4th from Vietnam to reach auction



SOTHEBY'S announced a sale of Ca Mau shipwreck ceramics for 30-31 January 2007 at Amsterdam. For Vietnam, it is the 4th such auction after the Vung Tau (c. A.D. 1690s), Hoi An (c. 1500) & Binh Thuan (c. 1608) sales in 1992, 2000 & 2004 respectively. For S.E. Asia overall, where more than 150 wrecks have been reported

since 1974, this is only the 8th cargo to reach auction. Representative and unique finds from the wreck, which was excavated in 1998-99, have already been shared among Vietnamese museums.

Le Cong Uan, director of the Ca Mau Historical Museum, says the cost of the excavation was about US\$1 million, while Sotheby's estimates the sale will bring about US\$2.5 million.

Occasionally ceramics from the wreck have been available on the open market in Vietnam and elsewhere in the region since the 1990s. Their source is unknown, but they have been popular enough to inspire a successful range of copies.

Buyers can however be assured that only pieces from the official excavation are being sent for auction. More than 130,000 ceramics were excavated, and about 76,000 (divided into about 1500 lots) pieces will be offered at auction.

The earliest S.E. Asia wrecks to auction were the Hatcher Ming Junk in 1983 & Geldermalsen in 1986. v

National Palace Museum visitors In honor of plans for a southern branch of the National Palace Museum that would include Southeast Asian art alongside Chinese art, the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum and its primary patron, Surat Osathanugrah gave a gift of six antique Thai ceramics to the Taiwan-based museum. Two officials from the NPM, Drs. Tsai Mei-fen (left) and Shih Ching-fei (right) are shown here visiting Mr Surat in Bangkok. v



Assortment of Ca Mau (c. 1723-35) wreck ceramics sold on Ho Chi Minh City's Le Cong Kieu St in early 2005.



## Letter from the editor

IT IS A GREAT pleasure to report that our museum is quite popular with Bangkok University students who visit in small groups and large at a rate of 30-40 students on the average school day. The students shown here are from the English-language international college section of the university. They sat raptly for an hour-long lecture on the chronology for Thai ceramics, then spent time in the main gallery writing up short essays on what they learned about the exhibits. Here a group of students poses in front of our medium-sized storage jars display. Photograph by Watchira Sununsangthong. RMB v



## Letters to the editor



**Aceh pots**  
I saw your announcement for the Guangdong lecture, and I wonder if Ms Sharon could give a date and provenance for these



pieces? [photos above] Maybe late 12th C? The two small stoneware pots (upper photo above), the bulbous one with an opaque whitish glaze, were dredged up a couple of months ago from a fishpond in Aceh Besar along with Fujian and Zhejiang Southern Song and some later material. Another piece (lower photo) of the same type and from same place has *qingbai* glaze. The context is generally middle Song to Yuan, but there could be something earlier.

—E. Edwards McKinnon, Aceh

Sharon Wong Wai Yee replies: Please be aware that I am seeing only photographs. However, the two pieces shown together appear to be Guangdong ware from the Xicun kilns, while the pot shown alone appears to be Guangdong ware from the Chaozhou kilns. All three are most likely to be from the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. [See next page for Sharon's talk on Guangdong ware at our museum.]

### Celadon in Tamil Nadu

On a recent visit to Pondicherry south of Chennai, India we went to nearby Arikamedu, a site famous for its early connections with Rome and its glass bead production. In the site museum we noticed some celadon fragments which appeared to my untrained eye to be Southeast Asian. The museum is part of the Arikamedu Historical Society, started single-handedly by a dedicated and energetic fellow named Suresh Pillai.

([arikamedu@gmail.com](mailto:arikamedu@gmail.com)).

--Donald Stadtner, USA

Editor replies: We have looked very closely at the two photos above, but all the pieces look Chinese. It seems like there *should be* Thai and/or Burmese celadon in India, but so far none has ever been documented. It would be a major discovery to identify any types of Southeast Asian ceramics at all in India. If anyone does, please let us know!

### River diving

Recently I was re-reading your newsletters. It was interesting to read about all the ceramic river finds [Nov 2005]. In the 70s and early 80s I used to go to Ayudhya with friends. We would hire a boat and go out on the river to see 'the professional ceramic divers' surface with their finds. We bought pots from their boats or their shore houses. (I think just about everybody in Bangkok at the time did the same!) There must be lots of broken ceramics everywhere in S. E. Asia's waterways as they were used as garbage dumps. Staying in Penang at the Rasa Sayang Hotel in the 70s, I used to find blue and white shards on the beach every morning. I guessed that they had been washed up over night from a garbage dump. —Gunilla Friis, Subiaco, Australia

Editor: Gunilla enclosed an article on a working diver named Chuay Kaewpresert, aged 70, and his son Od, 20. The article is from The AP, March 2, 2002. If anyone has more current news, please let us know!



### Mark identification?

I am working on the acquisition of a ceramic dish at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. It was collected in Timor and from the image on the front and the technique I suspect it might be a 19th C Dutch piece. I wonder if you recognize the mark on the base. [photo above] It shows what looks like a snake with a raised head above the letters 'M. O. C.' — Kelly Rowe, Intern ([Kelly.Rowe@nt.gov.au](mailto:Kelly.Rowe@nt.gov.au))



### Kendi in Cambodia

I am back in Siem Reap as an assistant on the Khmer Culture section of the Angkor-Kyung Yo International Exhibition, a project between the Khmer and Korean governments, which is planned for 21 November 2007 through 9 January 2008. I attach a photo of a kendi that will be an exhibit. Do you know anything about the history of this shape? — Leng Rattanak, Siem Reap



Editor replies: The shape is called a kendi; this example is unusual for having two necks. Unglazed earthenware kendi are common on shipwrecks from at least the 10th C. Ones with a similar side spout come from the Ko Si Chang I (1574-1619) wreck, Gulf of Thailand. While some types were made in S. E. Asia, the evidence is beginning to favor China as a major source, even for unglazed pieces.

Guangdong ceramics update

Ms Wong Wai Yee, or 'Sharon', presented a major update on Guangdong ceramics, the first since exhibitions by the ceramics societies in Kuala Lumpur (*A Ceramic Legacy of Asia's Maritime Trade, Song Guangdong Wares and other 11<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century Trade Ceramics found on Tioman Island, Malaysia*, 1985) and Manila (*Guangdong Ceramics From Butuan and Other Philippine Sites*, 1989). Archaeology conducted since the 1980s allowed Ms Wong to divide the wares into three basic time periods: 9<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> C., late 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> C, and late 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> C. Although there was some fine ware, coarse green glazed ceramics were the primary product of the first period, and they were sold on domestic as well as overseas markets. There were technical improvements in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period along with wide-spread imitation of wares from other areas. But then production was drastically reduced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, late 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> C. This means that many ceramics once identified as Guangdong are more likely to be Fujian ware. Sharon gave her talk at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum on September 9, 2006. She is shown at far right in the photo together with museum staff and guests.



More Letters to the Editor ...  
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Crouching tiger, hidden dragon

In May 2006, in the course of my research on a biography of Egbert Willem Van Orsoy De Flines, I visited the Makam Sunan Gunung Jati tomb at Cirebon. I wanted to see ceramics Egbert had photographed in the 1930s. The tomb is complex but I found the Ruang Pusaka ('treasury room') and it is still the same as in the 1930s. After a payment to the keeper, he opened the door. It was amazing. It contained dozens of Chinese and Japanese ceramics from the late Ming to early Qing dynasties. They were dusty and dirty but we took photos and a video. There was a fantastic garden jar in underglaze blue and red, 17<sup>th</sup> C., showing the theme 'crouching tiger, hidden dragon'! The theme has become famous as the title of an award-winning movie, and my nephew says there is a similar jar at the Xiaolin temple in China. Do your readers know of any other examples of this theme on ceramics? — Zheng Jin Ie, Jakarta



Vietnam pot in Netherlands

Some 10 years ago I headed a 5-year project on betel chewing in Vietnam and now in retirement I am becoming a lime pot hobbyist. I would like to share a surprising discovery with your readers. It is a very rare lime pot with an inscribed poem in old Vietnamese *chu' nho* characters. It appears to be from the early 19th century and it was made at a private kiln at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China. The pot was found in the collection of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde at Amsterdam; it was acquired in 1986. If anyone knows of other unpublished Vietnamese limepots with inscriptions, I would be happy to learn about them.

— Prof-Dr Nguyen Xuan Hien



Ht 13.8 cms.



Chinese ceramics in Africa

I wonder if you can help identify some ceramics from my excavations. I'm the director of excavations at Kilwa in southern Tanzania. Kilwa is an archipelago of four islands. On the island of Sanjiya Kati there are beautiful old ruins from a Persian town where many Chinese ceramics [3 photos here] from 10th-13th C. are found. Could you help identify their type, origin and age?

For background on our sites, see our finds from Gedi in Kenya (excavated 1999-2003) [http://diplomatie.gouv.fr.] Gedi, 16 kms from modern Malindi is the site of the old Malinda visited by Admiral Zheng He in the early 15th C. —Dr. Stephane Pradines, Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale (IFAO)



Editor replies: It's exciting to hear about Chinese ceramics in Africa, and I can confirm, based on the 16 photos sent, that these pieces do fall into the 10th-13th C. A piece-by-piece identification, however, with full citation of supporting evidence, would take even a professional a week to a month of unrelenting research. I suggest you contact a very able French specialist, Marie-France Dupozat, for a professional report.

