



Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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Past newsletters at
<http://museum.bu.ac.th>

Khmer kiln excavation

Report progress, 11th C. AMS date

CAMBODIAN archaeologists Heng Piphall and Chhay Rachna have sent news on Thnal Mrech kiln 2 (TMK 002). It is one of two kilns excavated (by two different teams) on Phnom Kulen this last January 2007 (Jan-Feb 2007 issue, p. 3). Although some green-glazed 'Kulen' ceramics may be 9th C, five charcoal samples gave an AMS calibrated date for this kiln as AD 1016-1031.

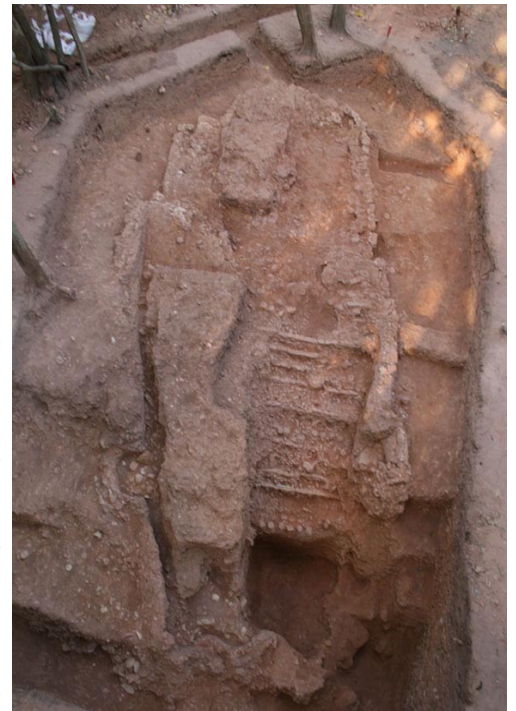
The kiln, 8.2 x 3.6 m, was built on the steep slope of a dyke. Its upper part was a collapsed kiln that was re-built into a new one.

Some 480 kg of ceramic debris was collected that is now being classified into 9 families of ware based on morphology and modern Cambodian terms. A full classification will help answer questions about whether similar wares were made at other Khmer kiln sites or if Thnal Mrech ware was traded widely within Khmer lands.

The site was first identified by E. Aymonier (late 19th C.) who noted that one name for the area was Sampov Thleay (wrecked ship) and that the local people said Chinese survivors from a shipwreck built the kilns. Archaeologists now call the site Thnal Mrech ('pepper road'). Work on the eagerly awaited final report progresses steadily.

Since there is not yet a convincing reconstruction of an old Khmer kiln based on archaeological traces or an explanation on how one worked, it will be interesting to see what secrets TMK 002 may reveal.

—Reporting by Heng Piphall & Chhay Rachna



Ceramics from kiln TMK 002 are being classified into nine families of ware. The site mapping, excavation and analysis are a cooperative project between APSARA Authority of Cambodia & National University of Singapore (with special thanks to John Miksic).



Letter from the editor

IMPORTANT!!
Semester break: Museum
CLOSED
8-20 August 2007

THE OLD KILNS on Phnom Kulen were seen in 1883 and then first mentioned in E. Aymonier's *Le Cambodge* (1901), so the January excavations are a major step forward. Besides questions about how the kilns worked, there are also questions about when exactly brown-glaze appeared on Khmer ceramics. So far no brown glaze has been reported at Thnal Mrech. —RMB

Letters to the editor

Chocolate base

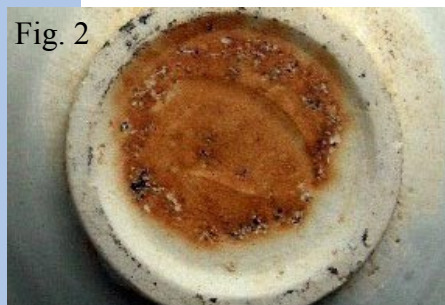
I have two comments to add to the discussion in your letters columns on the matter of brown bases on some Vietnamese wares. Firstly, it is interesting that some of the 15th C. and later ceramics made in Yunnan also have this feature. Yunnan wares also have other features similar to those on Vietnamese ceramics, no doubt due to influence developed through the relative closeness of the two kiln areas. I have visited most of the known ancient kilns in Yunnan and have found this chocolate dressing on some bases most commonly on pots made at Jianshui kilns, probably the most southern of the kilns making these wares in Yunnan.

Fig. 1



See Fig 1 for an example from Jianshui. It is interesting to speculate whether Yunnan or Vietnamese potters were the first to use this decorative feature. Secondly, It has occurred to me that this brown colouring was added for cosmetic reasons alone, perhaps in imitation of the brown colouring which developed naturally in the kiln on some earlier Chinese ceramics such as the Song qingbai wares (Fig 2).

Fig. 2



May I also take this opportunity to bring to the attention of readers that there is to be a symposium on Yunnan ceramics, concentrating on the cobalt decorated wares, to be held in Kunming from 25th to 30th November. I have always felt that the ceramics of Yunnan owe

as much to the production of pots in countries to the south of China as in China itself and therefore this symposium might be of interest to readers. The symposium is being organised by the Chinese Society for Ancient Ceramics, The Palace Museum Beijing.
(Email: zggtxh@hotmail.com).

— Cyril Beech, U. K

Chocolate bases, more

More on those mysterious brown-bottoms: Another suggestion about the origin of brown wash base was offered by the Japanese archaeologist MORIMOTO Asako at the March 2007 Singapore Symposium on the Chinese Export Ceramic Trade in Southeast Asia. Ms. Morimoto, who has done field work in Vietnam, Japan and China, read a paper laying out the extensive influence of Chinese Yaozhou celadons on Vietnamese wares of the Tran dynasty (1225-1400 CE). Many Song period Yaozhou celadons (10-13th C.) have been recovered in Vietnam. She notes it is clear that northern Vietnamese potters esteemed high quality Yaozhou wares. They adapted Yaozhou's color, careful carving and molding into their own production, a kind of "Vietnamization". Likewise, it is possible that the distinctive burnt brown color of Yaozhou's unglazed bases might have lead Vietnamese potters to emulate it by painting iron-brown washes on bottoms of their stonewares, Morimoto-san postulates. Morimoto's paper will be published in the symposium proceedings. I have a copy of her draft that was made available at the March symposium.

—David Rehfuss, USA

Sunken blue?

On the blue and white shard illustrated in Letters to the editor of your recent May-June 2007 issue, the one sent by Bobby Orillaneda, it is most likely from the late Wanli period. As the body is rather thick, it may not be from Jingdezhen.

—Rita Tan, Manila

More on Vietnam gilt ware

I would like to add two more observations to our gilt ceramics article [May-June 2007 issue]:

1. Gilt shards have not yet been found at any kiln site. Local archaeologists think the gilt ware was made somewhere nearby Thang Long and not in the Chu Dau area.

2. No gilt ware has yet been found in the Thang Long citadel excavations, but other high quality pieces, some with an imperial mark on the base, have been found there.

— (Ms) Bui Kim Dinh, Ha Noi

Bangladeshi jars

Large gray jars, about 3 feet high, are found now & then throughout Lower Burma and even in Upper Burma, e.g. Prome or Pagan. Drs. Aung Bo and Myo Thant Tyn (Myanmar Ceramic Society) once suggested that the jars were Bangladeshi and early 20th C. Recently U Nyein Lwin (Dept Archaeology, Pagan) showed me one with an inscription in a godown near the new palace excavations. [photo below] The inscription in English & Bengali encircles the shoulder. In English: 'Galinda Cundra Paul, Bardhan Para, Dacca.'

The longer Bengali portion was read by Dr. Pratapaditya Pal (General Editor, Marg Publications): 'Sri Govinda Chandra Pal and his son Sri Sudhanya Chandra Pal of Bardhanpara.' Bardhanpara is a small town in Barisal, about 73 miles south of Dacca. I have seen these jars in Thailand only once – in the lobby of the Sukhothai hotel, Bangkok!!

—Donald Stadtner, USA



Pierre-Yves Manguin: Ship more likely S. E. Asia than Chinese

IN REGARDS TO the ship depicted on a Vietnamese stem plate from the Hoi An shipwreck [Newsletter, May-June 2007], Pierre-Yves Manguin, who has written on the subject of shipwreck construction, remarks:

“She no doubt is a large ship (with 3 masts). The only feature worth noting is the bow: the yellow keel piece is clearly seen protruding, and rather than a stem post there is a triangular, flat panel. [The two timbers that make the upright sides of the flat panel begin close together just above the keel, then open wider in a V-shape.] This is reminiscent only of the bifid Austronesian stems and, specifically,

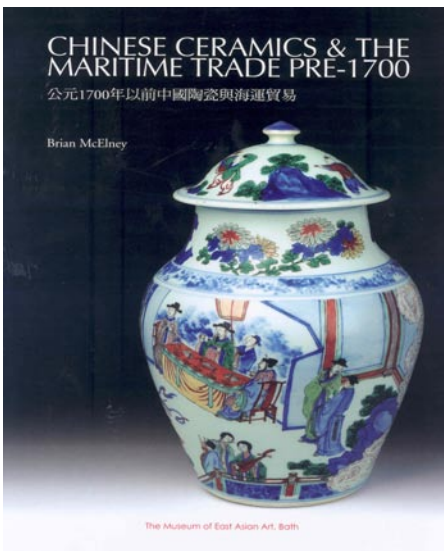
of Madurese golekan still to be observed in Javanese harbors in the 1980s. (I. e., it is not a South China Sea tradition ship, but a purely S. E. Asian one.)

“Chinese junks of Fuzhou and further north would also have a flat bow panel, but with a different shape; they would not have a protruding keel piece, and would have a rounded bottom, not V-shaped like this one. Of course, the small size of the drawing makes this evidence flimsy, I admit. Nothing can be seen of what would be tell-tale rudder(s) at the stern, unfortunately. The decoration is in the overall style of the plate, therefore does not teach us much. However, the



Above: Detail from a gilt decorated Vietnam stem plate, Hoi An shipwreck (January-February 2007, p. 1)

drawing could well represent a ship from Champa or Insular Southeast Asia (Malay, Javanese ?).”



Brian McElney, *Chinese Ceramics & The Maritime Trade Pre-1700*. U. K.: Museum of East Asian Art, 2006. HK\$450.

Hong Kong Exhibition

ALONG WITH an exhibition originally organized by Brian McElney for the Museum of East Asian Art, Bath, the University Museum & Art Gallery offered an afternoon symposium on 16 June 2007 with five speakers including Li Jian'an and Cao Ganyuan from Fujian and Jiangxi respectively. Other speakers are shown at right. A catalogue (hard cover, HK\$450, shown left) of the 112 ceramics has a bi-lingual English-Chinese text.



Photo right (clockwise from upper left): Anita Wong, Curator of History, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong; Christine van der Pijl-Ketel, who spoke on the Dutch trade;

Brian McElney who gave an overview of the export trade; and Roxanna Brown, who gave examples for using the evidence of trade ceramics to review old historical questions.

Glued-on sea grit

WITH CONTINUAL news about newly discovered shipwreck ceramics, it is not surprising that entrepreneurs are busy trying to creatively serve the market. These two photographs (at right) were taken at an undisclosed backroom location in S. E. Asia. The sellers insist that such pieces are continually found at various off-shore sites by local fishermen. They are unbroken, says the seller, because he/she acquires only the best pieces from the fishermen.

Buyers, be wary!!



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 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.

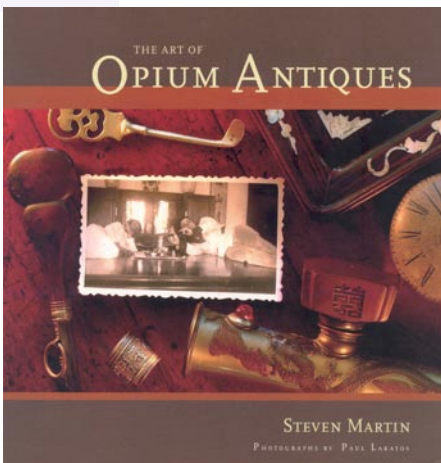


Interior views of the museum (from upper left) show a variety of storage jars; a 5-period outline chronology for Thai trade ceramics; and an open 'sandpit' mixture of Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics made about AD 1380-1430, with Northern Thai ceramics in the background.

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THAILAND

For enlarged map, go to
<http://museum.bu.ac.th>



Steven Martin, *The Art of Opium Antiques*. Photographs by Paul Lakatos. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2007. 125 pages, 98 color photos, 13 black & white. Thai Baht 625.

Little known ceramics art

WITH the growing number of collectors in China itself, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find genuine old Chinese art for sale. The imperial arts, in particular, are quite beyond the means of most collectors. One result is that once lowly trade ceramics are becoming objects of interest and desire, as are other minor arts. This book argues that great art once seeped into the world of opium smoking, and that there are still some stunning antiques from that underworld that survived the eradication campaigns of the 19th-20th centuries.

Ceramics are one of the most essential objects among the various paraphernalia. The 'bowl' of the opium pipes was generally made of fired clay. Some of the finest examples are made from the same yixing clay as the famous yixing teapots. And, like those teapots, the opium bowls also feature potter's chop marks. They

are however usually more elaborately decorated with landscapes, mythical creatures and sometimes poems. Blue and white examples are more rare, and polychrome ones were perhaps made only in the early 19th C. —RMB

For more information on all aspects of opium smoking antiques, see www.opiummuseum.com

Below: Opium bowls from the Tek Sing (1822) ship which was sailing from China to Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia) when it sank in the Riau Archipelago south of Singapore. They feature carved and incised decoration along with once colorful glazes. This may be the earliest archaeological context for the bowls.

