



# Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter

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## Re-cataloging SEACM Prehistoric Ceramic Collection



**Fig. 1** Ban Kao tripod bowl, 1800-1500 B.C.

The cataloging of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM) collection started beginning in 2011 and continues in progress together with developing a database management system. Around 18,000 items of the SEACM collection are entered onto the database with their descriptions and curatorial comments included, while the prehistoric ceramics are one of the very important lots in the collection as they are from several origins.

Prehistoric ceramics of the SEACM collection total around 423 items and can be identified to be all earthenware with several techniques of forming and decoration that originated from at least 5 cultural groups comprising the Ban Kao, Ban Chiang, Thung Kula Ronghai, Ban Prasat and Lopburi-Pasak cultural groups dated around 2100 B.C.-A.D. 700 in the Late Neolithic, Bronze and Iron

Ages. A few of them are unidentified, but they can be dated in the same range of dates. The results of re-cataloging the SEACM prehistoric ceramics are the following:

Ban Kao derives from the name of the sub-district in Kanchanaburi, western Thailand that was the first area in which have been found the tripod ceramics. Ban Kao ceramics in the collection have only a few forms as they are all earthenware tripod pots, basins or bowls (Fig.1) with legged stands and wide mouth jars or pots. They usually have a small hole in each leg that is probably a hole for permitting the heat into each leg of the stand during the firing. The modes of decoration on Ban Kao ceramics comprise slipping, smoking, polishing and cord-marked stamping. Based on the current archaeological research results it can be concluded that Ban Kao ceramics were commonly found in the habitation and burial sites in western and southern Thailand, and some parts of Malaysia, which are dated around 1800-1500 B.C. (Miksic, 2003; Natapintu, 2007).

Ban Chiang derives from the name of the sub-district in Udon Thani, northeastern Thailand in which the Fine Arts Department of Thailand

### Letter from the Editor

In the first trimester of 2016, a lot of work related to ceramic study around Southeast Asia has been done, especially recent progress in archaeological research and brand new exhibitions in the museum. First of all, Atthasit Sukkham reports about the progress of re-cataloguing prehistoric ceramics in the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM) collection and the identified ceramic forms from the cultural groups around Thailand. Wanaporn Khumbutshya writes about the research results of Si Satchanalai maternity figurines produced in the 16th century, which resulted in the development of the special exhibition at SEACM last year. In the "Collection Review", Burin Singtoaj describes the Bat Trang white glazed lime pot as one of displayed ceramics in the SEACM current exhibition "Betel Chewing, Tea and Ceramics: Asian Cultures and Relaxation." Also, the opening reception of the special exhibition entitled "Betel Chewing, Tea and Ceramics: Asian Cultures and Relaxation" at SEACM in Bangkok was held on April 2, 2016, and the exhibition will be open to the public from now until August 6, 2016 with no admission fee. The Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore has also opened brand new galleries that relate to ceramic display, and some updates on the ceramic research in Myanmar were published, these all are included in the "News in Brief."



**Fig. 2** Early Ban Chiang jar, 2100-900 B.C.



**Fig. 3** Late Ban Chiang jar, 300 B.C.-A.D. 200

discovered huge prehistoric burial sites in the early period of archaeological research in Thailand. Also, UNESCO designated this site as one of World Heritage Sites of Thailand. Ban Chiang ceramics were produced as burial goods for funeral offerings in the primary burials or used as the burial jars for primary infant burials or secondary burials. The modes of decoration can be divided into 2 styles: first are the black incised and impressed ceramics buried in the early Ban Chiang period or Neolithic around 2100-900 B.C. (Fig. 2), and second are the red on buff ceramics (painted with red on yellowish brown surface and some with incising) buried in the middle and late Ban Chiang period or Bronze and Iron Ages around 900 B.C.-A.D. 200 (Fig. 3). Both styles are decorated by simple geometric designs, especially zigzag, curve, circle and spiral designs, for instance. Painted human and animal designs in red are also included as they are now displayed

at Ban Chiang National Museum. The archaeologists believe the sources of inspiration were the people, animals and environment around them (White, 2016).

Thung Kula Rong Hai derives from the name of the legend as translated to be "the fields of the crying Kula." In fact, Thung Kula Rong Hai is a dry region in Korat Basin of north-eastern Thailand. The region is located in the present-day provinces of Surin, Maha Sarakham, Buriram, Sisaket and Roi Et. There is, as well, a big river named "Shi River" rising from west to east across this region. A few Thung Kula Rong Hai ceramics are in the SEACM collection consisting of a few large burial jars with applied linear decoration around the neck and cord-marking on the whole body. According to the results of the Ban Mueang Bua archaeological excavation, the site is located in Roi Et, northeastern Thailand, and was investigated by the Fine Arts Department of Thailand during 2001-2003. The archaeologists and archaeology students from Silpakorn University categorized the ceramics into 4 forms: first are the large burial jars used as "capsule jar burial" consisting of two large jars with their mouths joined together, which included the general form of jars, to contain the secondary burial and some burials also contained bronze ornaments, second are the fragments of slipped pots as daily-use ceramics, third are the fragments of cord-marked pots as daily-use ceramics, and the last are "Roi Et wares" which are low-fire earthenware with thin bodies decorated by cord-marking, polishing and red painting (Higham, 1996, 218; Baonoed, 2010). These sites have been given the dates of 1500 B.C.-A.D. 500 (Baonoed, 2010).



**Fig. 4** Ban Prasat ceramics, 1050-420 B.C.

Ban Prasat derives from the name of sub-district in Nakhon Ratchasima in which the Fine Arts Department of Thailand discovered a huge prehistoric burial site in the early period of archaeological research in Thailand, and where there is still a site museum. Ban Prasat ceramics have cultural patterns similar to Ban Non Wat and Ban Lum Khao, which all are located on the area of Khorat Plateau in Nakhon Ratchasima, northeastern Thailand. Ban Prasat ceramic forms in the collection comprise of pots with large everted mouth and oval body, but some have a carinated body, and stem dishes. All of them are decorated by slipping and cross marking on the base (Fig. 4). According to the results of the Ban Non Wat archaeological excavation by Charles Higham and others, the ceramic forms of Ban Non Wat comprise of stem dishes, stem bowls, cups, bowls, pots and jars. Neolithic Age ceramics are decorated by incising, stamping, cross marking, fingernail impressing, applying, and red painting of minimal decoration (Sarjeant, 2014). Bronze Age ceramics, especially, are found more locally and they have a large everted mouth, oval body, but some have a carinated body, and pedestal with

cross marking, red slipping and painting of minimal decoration. These decoration techniques also appear on Iron Age ceramics, especially on the pots and jars (Sarjeant, 2010). Ban Non Wat has been given the date of around 1650 B.C.-A.D. 600 (Higham and Higham, 2009). Hence, Ban Prasat ceramics of the SEACM collection are similar to the Bronze Age ceramics from Ban Non Wat, which can be dated around 1050-420 B.C. (Higham and Higham, 2009, 137).

Lopburi-Pasak derives from the name of the large river basin located to the east of the Chao Phraya River in central Thailand, with both Lopburi and Pasak are the name of a big river. Lopburi-Pasak ceramics are a large number of the SEACM collection. One of the rare ceramic forms in the collection is the earthenware stove with three-legged stand inside the fire bowl, high pedestal, flat base and heavy weight (Fig. 5). However, this stove has no provenance record and has no evidence of burning on both the interior and exterior so that the exact function is still mysterious and is between a stove for cooking and a funeral offering. Other general ceramic forms comprise of cups, pots and especially jars in several shapes including that of a human, an



**Fig. 5** Possible prehistoric stove, provenance from Lopburi, 1000-700 B.C.

elephant or a bull. These are basically decorated by red slipping and polishing, as well as the local modes of decoration, which are the S-shaped incision and punctate or roulette stamping including cord-marked stamping (Figs. 6 and 7). From the current archaeological research results it can be concluded that these general forms of Lopburi-Pasak ceramics were found only in the burial sites around central Thailand, which included ceramics as burial goods for funeral offerings with the dead bodies together with other materials, such as bronze ornaments or iron tools, during 1000-700 B.C. (Natapintu, 2007; Sarjeant, 2014).

According to the current archaeological excavations related to prehistoric ceramic study in Thailand, a few archaeological sites have still been discovered and excavated over the recent decade, such as Nong Ratchawat site in Suphan Buri of the Ban Kao cultural group, Ban Pong Manao and Ban Promthin Tai sites in Lop Buri and Ban Pong Takob in Saraburi of Lopburi-Pasak cultural group, Ban Non Wat site in Nakhon Ratchasima as a site similar to the Ban Prasat cultural pattern, and Ban Mueang Bua site in Roi Et of the Thung Kula Ronghai cultural group, for instance. The



**Fig. 6** Other forms of Lopburi-Pasak ceramics, 1000-700 B.C.



**Fig. 7** Lopburi-Pasak jar, 1000-700 B.C.

excavations of these sites are building more new knowledge and theories in prehistoric ceramics especially on the dating, context, chronology, typology, and form, as well as stylistic and production technology.

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## Si Satchanalai Maternity Figurines Loving Relationship between Mother and Child

Si Satchanalai city was an important ceramic production site of the ancient Sukhothai Kingdom and the Siam Kingdom during the late 13th to early 16th centuries. The archaeological excavations there have uncovered many kilns scattered on the two banks of the Yom River. Most of the kilns are cross-draft type constructed of brick, which is the kiln type for firing ceramics at high temperatures. The production centers were the Ko Noi and the Pa Yang kilns in the Si Satchanalai kiln complex. However, the Si Satchanalai figurines are the artworks produced only at the Pa Yang kilns in the late period of production around the 16th century (Rooney, 2013).

In the case study of maternity figu-



**Fig. 1** Figurine of mother holding a child snuggled up to the breast, Si Satchanalai (Pa Yang) kilns, 16th century

rines in the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University it was found that there were 17 body gestures of carrying a child in 138 positions. There were many different types of ceramic wares produced, in-

cluding green glazed, brown glazed, and underglaze black. Maternity figurines including two pregnant figurines, nine figurines of a woman holding a child in the cradle hold position, eight figurines of a woman holding a child by supporting the neck and buttocks, one figurine of a woman holding a child with the head in the crook of the arm, 46 figurines of a woman holding a child snuggled up to the breast (Fig. 1), one figurine of a woman holding a child across the shoulder, nine figurines of a woman holding a child with the legs straddling the waist, seven figurines of a woman holding and comforting the child, one figurine of a woman holding a child beside the body, five figurines of a woman holding a child and sitting with one knee up, one



figurine of a woman holding a child sitting on the shoulder, three figurines of a woman holding two children, one figurine of a woman holding a child with crossed hands, 41 figurines of a woman holding a child by supporting the back and buttocks, one figurine of a woman carrying a child riding on her back, one figurine of a man holding a child on the lap, and one figurine of a woman holding a child on the lap with fan in hand.

Maternity figurines produced at the Pa Yang kilns (Fig. 2) reflect the wisdom of ancient people in taking care of children. In the ancient times, medical care for children and mothers after birth was not advanced, and raising children was not as easy as today. The mother had to learn through the sayings and teachings of the experienced older generation. Maternity figurines in various postures were a toy for girls who will be mothers. They helped children learn how to be a mother in the future. Children who play with these figurines can absorb knowledge for raising children and understanding of the loving relationship between mother and child. This requires that the maternity figurines must be glazed to make them more beautiful and more durable. The study of maternity figurines shows the expression of a mother's love and her care of children, with some of the postures still used until today. Maternity figurines may have been discovered without head due to the production method used of sculpting the body and head separately and then sticking them together later. When the figurines fall down, the thinnest part at the joint of the head and neck may break. Depending upon the context of the discovery of the figurines, they may



**Fig. 2** Maternity figurines, Si Satchanalai (Pa Yang) kilns, 16th century

be seen as an interesting reflection upon the lives of people in ancient times, and a new perspective on the lives of the children.

This study found that maternity figurines reflect the lives and childcare practices in the ancient Sukhothai and the Siam Kingdom. The relationship between mother and child is seen in the form of the figurines. Starting from pregnancy and including different gestures maternity figurines imitate the appearance of real life. Holding and hugging shows a feeling of love and warmth. The face of figurines shows true love and emotion between the mother and the child, including the characteristic of a child putting his head on the mother's shoulder.

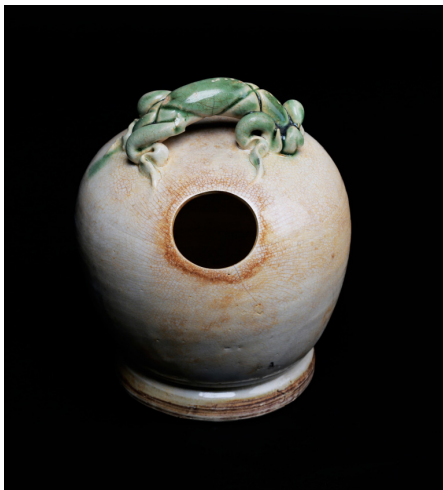
These artworks reflect the insight of the potters, who not only understood the emotions of living in society, but also showed the prosperity of the culture. For example, in the clothing of people, the mothers dress in traditional Thai fashion and have their long hair in chignon style. Women do not wear a cloth covering the breast due to the hot weather,

or when women are married and do not have to cover the upper body because of the need to breastfeed. Some of the women wear a shirt, breast cloth and shawl. Maternity figurines wear a loincloth, but do not wear shoes. People in the Sukhothai Kingdom chewed fermented tea leaves, keeping them in the mouth. Fermented tea leaves were also a favorite snack among the northern people. This habit is clearly illustrated in some of the figurines.

The technique of making figurines is an artwork that needs exceptional skill and expert craftsmen. Even though the figurines look simple, the shape, posture, and composition are perfect. This shows the genius and skill of the potters. The potters express the emotions and feelings in the appearance of the face and posture of the figurines, including the beautiful glazed decoration. All of these accomplishments are part of the pattern in the evolution of ceramics production up to the present day.

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## Collection Review



### Bat Trang White Glazed Lime Pot

Bat Trang kilns, Vietnam  
15th-17th centuries  
Later Lê dynasty (1428-1789)  
Diameter 15.6 cm.  
Height 19.3 cm.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum  
Bangkok University

Lime pot with green glazed handle in the shapes of an areca vine and nut, white glazed ovoid body, small hole for taking the lime paste out, chocolate base (brown slipped base) and everted foot. This form of lime pot is characteristic of the Bat Trang kilns, central Vietnam which especially produced between the 15th and 17th centuries (Stevenson, Guy & Cort: 1997; Truong & Stevenson:

2007). Some of them still has the feature of lime stain inside to confirm their function.

The earliest form of Bat Trang lime pot is a simple form with a round shaped body with a hole, as well as a handle shaped like a branch. They are glazed brown or green. Later the body of the lime pot is larger, with the ovoid body as well as a handle

developed by applying the shape of an areca vine and nut, representing the skill of the Vietnamese potters in developing designs and shapes from the environment around them.

Based on the ethnology of Northern highland ethnic groups in Vietnam and even in Thailand, the lime pots (as other forms) are the vessels for containing the lime paste, which is used together with areca nut and betel leaf as the necessary ingredients in the tradition of betel chewing. A spatula is used to take out the lime paste to spread on a betel leaf. The areca nut is then placed on it. The betel leaf is then folded into a quid, and then it is ready to serve. The exchange of quid was the way to greet a friend, neighbor and a guest (Nguyen Van Huy: 1998). And the tradition continues today in the elders around Southeast Asia.

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## News in Brief

### Latest Special Exhibition of SEACM, Bangkok



**Fig. 1** The geust of honor Mrs. Fumiko Boughey and her assistant perform the tea ceremony demonstration for Mr. Hideo Fukushima, minister of Embassy of Japan in Bangkok, and Dr. Mattana Santiwat, former president of Bangkok University, in the model of a tea house displayed in the exhibition

On April 2, 2016, Mrs. Fumiko Boughey, vice president and secretary general of Chado Urasenka, Bangkok Association, was the guest of honor and gave the opening speech and Japanese tea ceremony demonstration on the opening reception of special exhibition entitled “Betel Chewing, Tea and Ceramics: Asian Cultures and Relaxation” at the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University. The opening reception also included Dr. Dittawat Kawkarnjanadist, the president of the Chinese Culture and Tea Lovers Association, delivering a special talk on “History of Tea in Siam” as



**Fig. 2** Mr. Burin Singtoaj conducted curator's tour for Dr. Santiwat and all visitors

well as Mr. Burin Singtoaj conducting a curator's tour at the end.

Betel chewing and tea drinking cultures were the way of relaxing for

the Asian people among the elites, priests and commoners for a long period of history. The special exhibition focuses on the ceramic utensils which were used in betel chewing and tea drinking. Additionally, other types of utensils and their ingredients are also displayed, and some of them are available to touch, smell and get close to for studying and to enhance the visitor's experience and knowledge. The special exhibition is open from Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., from April 4 until August 6, 2016 with no admission fee.

***Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University  
April 2, 2016***

## Two New Galleries Related to Ceramics at ACM, Singapore



**Fig. 1** Chinese Ceramics Gallery of Asian Civilisations Museum

In 2016, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore opened two more new galleries following the completed revamp of new wings last year. The two new galleries comprise of “Chinese Ceramics” and “Trade and the Exchange of Ideas.”

In the new Chinese Ceramics Gallery, visitors can find ceramics made for

ritual burial in tombs to wares destined for the emperor's dining table. The objects inspire stories of how they were made, used, traded, and valued in the history of China. A special display shows the creamy white porcelain made in the Dehua kilns in Fujian province, which was highly coveted by Europeans and others outside of China.

The other completed gallery is Trade and the Exchange of Ideas displaying objects illustrating ancient trade routes in Asia that carried goods, ideas and art. Traders settled in new areas, learned new languages, spread new technologies, and introduced religions. This gallery displays exquisite works of art created out of these exchanges. Ceramics and textiles, carved ivory objects, finely worked silver and gold, tortoise shell and exotic woods used to make boxes and cabinets. Objects on display range from simple everyday necessities to precious luxuries.

For more information, visit the official website at <http://acm.org.sg/>.

***Asian Civilisations Museum  
May 4, 2016***



## Ancient Burials Revealed at Laos' Mysterious Plain of Jars, Laos PDR

A joint Australia-Laos archaeological research team has uncovered ancient human remains and various burial practices at the mysterious Plain of Jars in Laos. The Plain of Jars in Laos' Xieng Khouang province is scattered with thousands of stone jars and scientists have long been perplexed by their original use. This will be the first major effort since the 1930s to attempt to understand the purpose of the jars and who created them.

The excavations uncovered three types of burials at the site. In one practice, bones were buried in pits with a large limestone block placed over them, while other bones were



**Fig. 1** Human remains at an ancient burial ground at the Plain of Jars in Laos' central Xieng Khouang (provided by Australian National University)



**Fig. 2** An overview of an ancient burial ground at the Plain of Jars in Laos' central Xieng Khouang (provided by Australian National University)

found buried in ceramic vessels, separate from the jars. The researchers also found for the first time an instance of a body being placed in a grave. However, the stone jars remain a mystery as to what they were

used for. Only a few simple objects, such as a handful of glass beads, have been found with the human remains at the burial sites, which are thought to date from about 500 or 600 B.C. to 550 A.D.

**Bangkok Post**  
**April 4, 2016**

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## Ancient Site in Myanmar Offers Clues to Trade with Middle East, Myanmar



**Fig. 1** Fragments of celadon bowls unearthed in Myanmar (provided by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)



**Fig. 2** A symbol found on the bottom of a celadon bowl (provided by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)



**Fig. 3** A large number of clay columns were also uncovered from the former kiln site in Myanmar (Provided by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

An archaeological site in southern Myanmar may be the missing link in a chain that explains how sublime celadon porcelain from Asia ended up as far as the Middle East centuries ago.

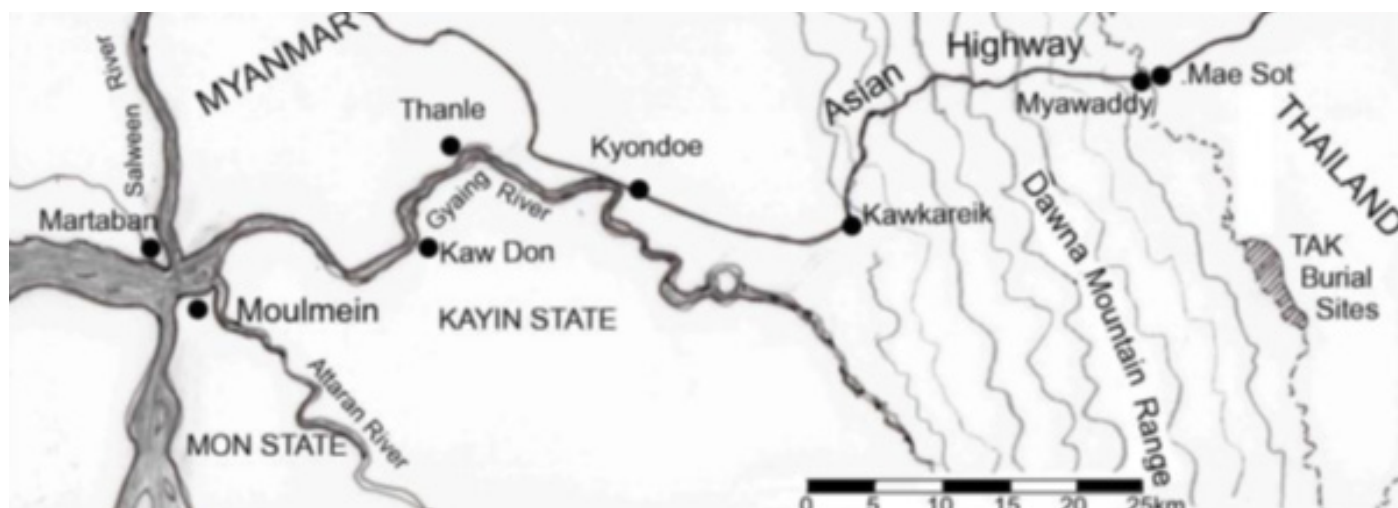
Celadon pottery, distinctive by its jade green celadon color, was highly prized by China's imperial court in ancient times.

Researchers at the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, as well as Kyoto University, recently joined a team from Myanmar's Ministry of Culture, along with specialists from the archaeology department at the University of Yangon, to excavate the site on privately-held land.

The Kyoto University team was led by Mamoru Shibayama, director of the ASEAN Center at the university. The February 3-6 excavation was at a kiln operated in Mawlamyaing, now the capital of Mon State in southern Myanmar that faces the Andaman Sea. The kiln is believed to have been a major celadon porcelain production center in the 15th to 16th centuries.



## Summary Report of Ceramics Production Sites in Mon and Kayin States, Myanmar



**Fig. 1** Sketch map of Kaw Don kilns and the area extending from Martaban to the Tak-Okmoei burial sites (Don Hein, 2015)

Dr. Don Hein, a research fellow of the Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution, in cooperation with Professor San Win, a former assistant director of Department of Historical Research, Ministry of Culture, Myanmar, announced that they had identified the first known production site for the famous Burmese green and white ware at Kaw Don Village in Kayin (Karen) State and had also surveyed another 11 possible ceramic production sites both in Mon and Kayin States, southern Myanmar.

Green and white ware became widely known after its discovery in the early 1980s at burial sites along the border of Thailand and Myanmar called the “Tak-Okmoei burial site.” According to Don’s summary report, it was possibly produced at the village of Kaw Don, which lies around 3 kilometers outside the large rural town of Kaw Bein. There are 10 kiln mounds from 2 meters to 4 meters in height. At that time the team briefly visited Kaw Don and recognized it as a production site of celadon stoneware and white glazed earthenware. In his follow-up visit, in addition to green and white kiln wasters the team found those of monochrome green glazed

wares and others with green glaze on the outside and white inside, along with the kiln furniture and evidence of the kilns themselves. Don noted that the production complex is much more extensive than first thought and included specialized kilns that produced Martaban-type large brown glazed jars, green glazed roof tiles and other products. His article about this topic is in progress and may be published online this year.



**Fig. 2** Green and white wares (Don Hein, 2015)

**Smithsonian’s Freer and Sackler Galleries**  
April 9, 2016