



Green Wares of Southern China

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The green wares of southern China are the world's oldest ceramics that are hard, dense, and durable—the ultimate predecessors of porcelain. China is unique in its development of these stonewares, which preceded any comparable products in the West by almost 3,000 years. The igneous rocks and volcanic ashes left in particular in the southeastern provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong from volcanic activity some 140 million years ago constitute highly suitable raw materials for producing such wares. They often can be used more or less as mined or can be easily processed by levigation, in which coarse particles are sifted out.¹

The potters' decisive step towards the creation of porcelain was therefore not an improved recipe for the ceramic material but the development of a wood-burning kiln that could achieve high enough firing temperatures (greater than 1,200 degrees C) to make the material "vitrify," i.e., melt into an impermeable, hard substance. The origins of such "high-fired" wares can be traced to China's Bronze Age, after the middle of the second millennium BCE. The earliest glazes on these stonewares developed naturally due to wood ash falling onto the hot vessel surface during firing, where it could react with the clay and melt into a glaze. Such fortuitous appearances of "kiln gloss" were imitated by mixing wood ash with clay slips to create proper lime glazes that could be applied more evenly over the vessel before firing. Due to the iron content in these mixtures, the glazes turned olive green in the kiln.

The ceramics recovered from the Belitung wreck include some 900 pieces of green-glazed stoneware from southern China, comprising a large group of massive storage containers and a smaller number of tablewares. The former served as packing cases for more valuable goods and were probably not intended for sale on their own; they may have been reused for several voyages. The latter constituted a precious part of the cargo. These fine green tablewares come from two different coastal regions in the southeast of China: from areas in Zhejiang, south of Shanghai, and in Guangdong, east of Guangzhou (Canton), both closely situated to international ports.

Among the earliest workshops for green-glazed stonewares are those of the Yue region of Zhejiang province. Yuezhou is the historical name of the area around Shaoxing, south of Hangzhou Bay, where kilns have operated at least since early historic times (the Shang dynasty, circa 1600–circa 1050 BCE). In the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the wares began to display a distinct style and identity. During the Six Dynasties period (220–589) the kilns' production was boosted in quality and quantity when all six southern dynasties chose nearby Nanjing as their capital. But in spite of its excellent quality, which had no match in China or anywhere else in the world, this ceramic ware—like all ceramics at that time—does not seem to have been regarded very highly for either its aesthetic or practical value and instead was used mainly for burial purposes.

With the foreign-ruled north perhaps more open to innovation, the development of ceramics made a great step forward around the sixth century. Stonewares comparable in quality to those from the south but now in three different colors—olive green, black, and white—began to be made in northern China. The Yue production experienced a temporary setback. Examples from the early Tang period (618–907) are rare. Even tombs in the south were temporarily furnished with earthenwares of lesser quality but more vivid coloration, which were more striking in appearance and therefore probably more prestigious.²

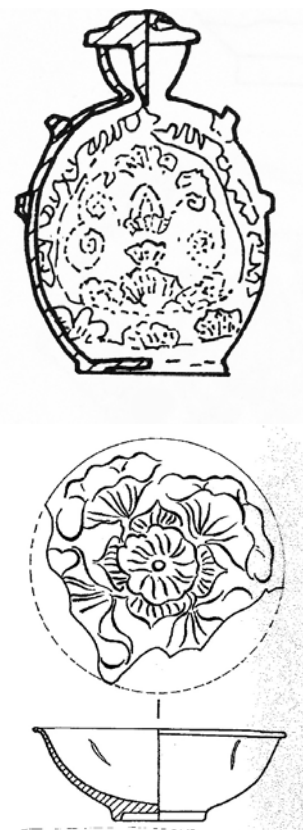
When the production of Yue ware recovered in the eighth century, it was with refined ceramics for the living. By that time, China had a native class of discerning connoisseurs with an interest in exquisite utensils for daily use, as well as a sizeable international community of merchants seeking valuable products to export. Both groups appear to have discovered the quality of China’s ceramics around the same time. With more than 2,000 years of experience in making green-glazed stonewares, the Yue area became one of the spearheads of China’s ceramic industry, and the name Yue emerged as a brand name for fine ceramics.

The appreciation of ceramics as a precious material was closely connected with the growing popularity of tea, a beverage probably introduced together with Buddhism in the first centuries of the Common Era. The celebration of tea was linked with Chan (Zen) Buddhist ceremonies: tea was drunk during meditation, with incense burning alongside, in temples and in elegant homes. In his famous eighth-century manual on the art of tea-drinking, *Chajing* (The Classic of Tea), the poet and tea connoisseur Lu Yu (730s–circa 804) ranks Yue ware tea bowls highest, since their blue-green glaze enhances the tea’s color.³ This smooth, shiny glaze in varied tones of green evoked the beauty and preciousness of polished jade. Following Lu Yu, a number of poets celebrated Yue ware in their writings, mostly in the ninth century.⁴ By the time the Belitung ship set sail, Yue wares were highly popular in China as superior vessels for food and drink, as well as medicine, incense, cosmetic, and writing utensils, among other uses. Their only true competitors were white Xing wares from Hebei, and the choice between the two was primarily a matter of taste.

Sometime before 874, the imperial household selected Yue ware to donate to the Famensi near Xi’an, one of the empire’s most important temples, as it held one of the holiest Buddhist relics. This so-called *mise* (“secret color”) ware represented the peak of the kilns’ production, a stage they reached not long after the Belitung ship was loaded. Yue is said to have been the official ware of the kings of Wu-Yue, who ruled the Zhejiang region during the Five Dynasties period (907–60). When the Song (960–1279) established their rule over China, this southern kingdom sent *mise* ceramics as tribute to the court, hoping to prolong its independence, which indeed it was able to keep until 978. With strong competition from the north, closer to the new seats of power, however, the Yue kilns eventually declined around the eleventh century.

Although some Yue ware may thus have reached imperial tables, the greater part of the kilns’ output was not for official use. Evidence of its use in China is altogether scarce, as the practice of furnishing tombs with lavish burial goods dramatically declined in the latter part of the Tang. Yue vessels are therefore rarely found in tombs, although the kilns manufactured some stoneware epitaphs expressly for burial.⁵ Far more important are the finds from settlement sites along China’s coast. Yue wares have been discovered in smaller numbers at Yangzhou, where many foreigners had settled⁶; and in large quantities at Ningbo (former Mingzhou) in Zhejiang, a lesser-known port in closest vicinity to the kilns, which has been particularly well researched. Ningbo yielded Yue ware shards in four different stratified layers, with vessels closely related to those of the Belitung wreck in two of them.⁷ (See figs. 128–129.)

As recently as 1994, Lin Shimin, the main archaeologist of the area, wrote that Ningbo harbor had provided a denser concentration of good-quality Yue shards than the kilns themselves. Even if this may no longer be the case, due to a more thorough investigation of the kiln sites, it attests to the importance of export for Yue production. Evidence of the maritime



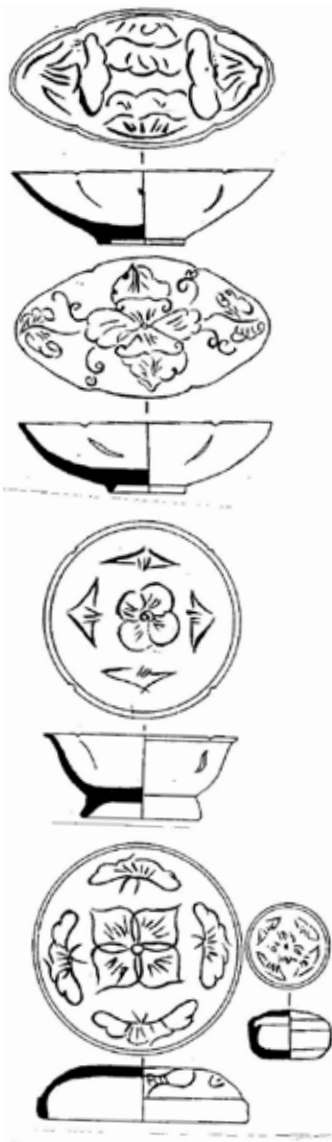
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Fig. 127 Bottle with lugs and incised floral sprays. Cat. 241.

ABOVE

Fig. 128 Top: Line drawing of a Yue ware bottle and stopper from a tomb dating to 779 at Sanmenxia, Henan; after Lin Shimin, *Celadon and Yue Kilns*, p. 262.

Bottom: Line drawing of a Yue ware four-lobed bowl with incised design from the Yuanhe stratum (806–20) of the Tang harbor site at Ningbo.



LEFT

Fig. 129 Line drawings of Yue ware incised bowls and boxes; a plain dish, ewer, and covered bowl; and an openwork incense burner, all from the Dazhong stratum (847–59) of the Tang harbor at Heyilu, Ningbo.

trade in Yue ware comes not only from harbor sites but also from other shipwrecks, although no comparable wreck has been fully researched. Very similar wares are reported to have been recovered from a wreck, probably of similar date, in the sea near Ningbo, which was not fully raised.⁸ More than 3,000 Yue ware fragments found at the Penghu archipelago between Fujian province and Taiwan derive from a ship believed to have sunk more than a century later, shortly after 977.⁹

From the late eighth century onward, Chinese ceramics appear in some quantity all along the Iranian coast as well as inland, and less plentifully on the Gulf's Arabian coast, in Mesopotamia, and farther west, in northern Africa.¹⁰ Rich sites predating the tenth century include Fustat in the southern suburbs of modern Cairo in Egypt, which has brought to light Chinese ceramics from as early as the ninth century; Samarra in Iraq, finds from which are believed to date largely from the period between 836 and 892, when the town was capital of the Abbasid Empire; and Siraf on the Iranian coast, which has yielded ceramics dating from circa 800 onward that include a greater percentage of Chinese examples than the other two sites. Even if many of the Persian and Arab sites mainly contain somewhat later Chinese material, they generally display a similar combination of wares as was found on the Belitung wreck. Quantitatively, however, Yue and other fine Tang green wares, as well as Xing and other Tang white wares, appear to have played a far more important role in these regions than the Belitung cargo suggests. The overwhelming predominance on the wreck of Changsha ware in relation to other wares is certainly not reflected in finds from Near Eastern sites and may suggest that part of this cargo was meant to be off-loaded elsewhere on the way.¹¹ Yue ware fragments of the ninth century are rare in Southeast Asia but were found at port sites in Thailand.¹² Yue wares found in Indonesia tend to be either of earlier or of later date, although Changsha bowls and ewers like those on the Belitung wreck are known from many excavations there.

Several hundred Yue kilns have been discovered along the Bay of Hangzhou, in particular around the shores of Shanglin Lake (Shanglinhu) southeast of Cixi, in close vicinity to Ningbo. Of some 200 kilns operating there mainly throughout the Tang and Song dynasties, the majority has now been investigated.¹³ These discoveries point overwhelmingly to this kiln group as the production area of the Yue wares on the Belitung wreck.

The Yue wares recovered are well made, finely finished, and represent the best quality available at the time. Potting is delicate; the body material is carefully prepared and has been fired to a light gray or yellowish-buff color and, at times, can be almost white; the glaze is thin and evenly applied, yellowish to olive green, and occasionally grayish or bluish green due to partial reduction of oxygen in the firing. Not all pieces are exactly alike in type and quality, but outright flaws are not noticeable. Variations may reflect the production of different individual kilns, but the wide range of states of preservation makes further identification difficult, and not enough comparative material has been published from individual kiln sites to enable more precise kiln attribution.

The Yue ware shapes on board (like those of Xing ware) were largely designed for Chinese rather than foreign habits and tastes and were most probably not made to foreign order. Only three pieces—a begonia-shaped bowl (fig. 135), a slop jar (fig. 54), and a basin (fig. 133)—are outstanding in terms of size and might reflect a Near Eastern preference for larger vessel shapes. They, too, are Chinese forms, even though the intended usage of a begonia-shaped bowl of this size has yet to be established. For many of the forms, more or less closely related versions are known in silver or gold; in some cases the closest versions are pieces found on the wreck itself, and they may have been made in a nearby region.¹⁴

Both metal and ceramic vessels show the predilection for lobed floral forms characteristic of the late Tang period. All lobed green-ware pieces in this cargo are four-lobed except for one single dish (fig. 54, far right); five-lobed shapes became popular in south China somewhat later. Though such lobed shapes often are explained as copies of metal forms, they are equally



LEFT, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Fig. 130 Four-lobed bowl with an incised floral medallion. Cat. 252.

Fig. 131 Four-lobed oval bowl. Cat. 249.

Fig. 132 Four-lobed bowl with incised floral medallion. Cat. 251.

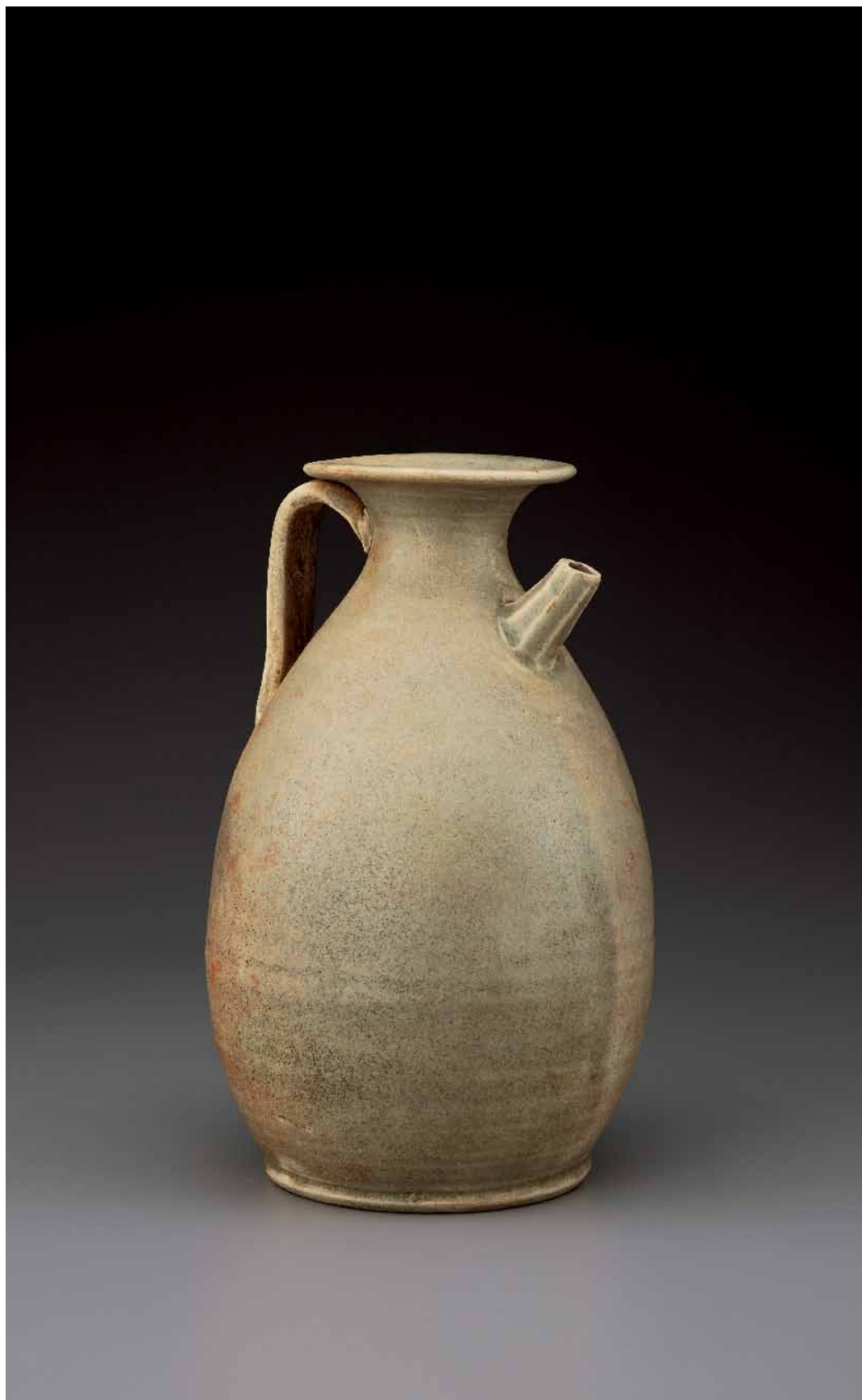
Fig. 133 Basin with four lugs. It may have been used to prepare medicines. Cat. 246.

Fig. 134 Barbed quatrefoil bowl. This form of bowl was unique for its period, although similar shapes would reappear centuries later. Cat. 248.

Fig. 135 Large lobed oval bowl in the form of a begonia blossom, a shape also seen in some of the gold dishes on the Belitung ship (see p. 221). Cat. 247.

RIGHT

Fig. 136 Pear-shaped ewer from the Yue kilns. Cat. 244.



characteristic of ceramics, as the indenting of a ceramic receptacle, while still soft, with a straight-edged tool is an easy and obvious process of shaping. The more exaggerated or complicated lobed and barbed forms, on the other hand, may well represent a direct response to the more distinct indentations achieved in metal.

Bowls and cups were used mainly for drinking, together with matching or lacquer bowl stands. The smallest were for wine and larger ones for tea; only the largest may have been used for food. The classic tea-bowl shape of the Tang dynasty, which was made over a long period of time and by many kiln centers, is conical or rounded and fired on a broad, shallow, ring-shaped foot with a central recess. It represents a relatively quick and easy method of forming a bowl by throwing it without a foot, then trimming the base with a knife and cutting a circle from the center. This makes the base thinner and less prone to firing cracks or warping, while at the same time providing an area large enough for broad spurs on which the piece could safely rest in the saggar (firing box). After the glaze had been applied over the whole vessel, either by dipping or pouring, it was wiped away again from the broad footring on which the piece was supported in the kiln. This distinctive type of foot, which is shaped like an archaic jade *bi*—a flat disc with a central hole used in ancient China for ritual purposes—came into use well before the present pieces were made and remained popular for some time after (fig. 138).

In archaeological sites, Yue bowls with this feature appear side-by-side with ones fired standing on an ordinary ring-shaped foot and with even later models featuring a flat, glazed base and no separate foot, which were supported in the kiln on a ring of spurs.¹⁵ Earlier pieces were often stacked in the kiln, without enclosing saggars, and therefore also show spur marks on the inside.¹⁶ Since excavations in Samarra first brought to light bowls with this distinctive disc foot, the whole type has become known as Samarra-type bowls (or bowls with a Samarra-type foot).¹⁷ The distribution of this type of foot from Xing over Yue to Guangdong kilns (and others in between)—that is, roughly from modern Beijing over Shanghai to Guangzhou—testifies to the wide exchange not only of goods but also of ideas and techniques during the Tang dynasty.

In contemporary depictions of the preparation of tea, bowls and stands are shown in use with ewers for hot water and slop bowls for discarding the water with which they were rinsed and warmed up or for the disposal of dregs. Boxes and other covered containers are known to have been employed for storing tea and spices, medicine, cosmetics, and probably seal paste. *Chajing* (The Classic of Tea) also mentions a dish or other type of vessel, such as a bottle or jar, for holding the salt that was added to the drink. Dishes for offering sweet meats or other relishes would have been used at the same time, and since incense was burned during the tea ceremony, incense vessels often are found together with tea utensils. The type of covered Yue ware incense burner with pierced designs recovered from the Belitung wreck is otherwise rarely seen (fig. 141).

Wine, made from grain, was drunk from smaller cups, which also had matching stands, and poured from bottles with a narrow opening, closed with a stopper. The Yue ware wine bottles found on the wreck have lugs for carrying on a strap or for fastening the stopper. Whether the distinctive shape of the twin-fish flask (fig. 55), which was made by a number of kilns at the time and is also known in silver, had a more specific purpose is not clear. Wide basins with pairs of lugs to attach straps or handles of another material (fig. 133) were presumably used to prepare medicines, as was the case with similarly shaped vessels in silver.¹⁸

Decoration still appears to have been of minor importance at the Yue kilns during this time. Many Yue ware vessels from the Belitung wreck are undecorated; others were sketchily incised with a fine tool. The exactly drawn designs also associated with Yue ware—such as incised figure scenes, butterflies, parrots, and phoenixes—the inscribed cyclical dates, and the complex carved relief and openwork designs all appeared only later in the Tang dynasty. They are not represented in the Belitung find.¹⁹

Many of the Yue wares from the Belitung wreck can be related to dateable companion pieces elsewhere. The most important evidence comes from the excavations of the Tang harbor at

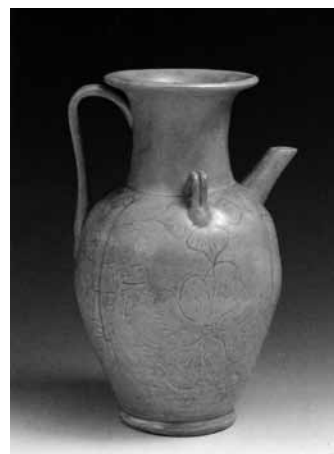


Fig. 137 Yue ware ewer dated by inscription to the first year of Dazhong, 847, Shanghai Museum.

Fig. 138 Rounded bowl
with *bi*-disc foot.



Heyilu in Ningbo, close to the Yue kilns. The dating of this site through stratigraphy and other evidence has been developed over more than two decades by Lin Shimin.²⁰ The site has brought to light many Yue as well as Changsha wares similar to pieces from the wreck in two different strata, attributed to the Yuanhe (806–20) and Dazhong (847–59) reigns of the Tang dynasty, respectively. Almost all Yue types recovered from the wreck have counterparts in the Dazhong stratum; a few styles were retained over a longer period and appear already in the Yuanhe stratum, but none of them is seen exclusively there. Comparisons postdating the Dazhong period are rare.

The main exception among the archaeological reference material, which does not fit in with the general dating, is a Yue wine bottle with lugs for a cord and a matching stopper (fig. 128)—an otherwise very rare shape—buried in a tomb in Sanmenxia, Henan, by 779.²¹ This type of vessel so far seems to have appeared neither at the Shanglinhu kiln sites nor the Ningbo harbor site, but the Belitung ship also carried similar white-ware bottles. Other related Yue items that can be dated prior to the Dazhong period display differences rather than similarities: A ewer with a short conical spout from a tomb dateable to 810 in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, is squatter, has distinct spur marks on the foot, and looks like a predecessor of items from the wreck rather than a contemporary piece.²² Another Yue ewer from a tomb dateable to 826 is altogether different in proportions, more slender, and more deeply lobed.²³

Conical bowls with a *bi*-disc foot clearly were made over a long period. They are known already from a kiln site associated with the year 794²⁴; they appear in both the Yuanhe and Dazhong strata at Ningbo, and they were also found in a tomb dateable to 840.²⁵ Slop bowls appear in both strata in various proportions.²⁶ Although a flared four-lobed bowl with incised design has also been discovered in the Yuanhe stratum, this seems to be an exception, as the majority of such shapes and incised designs come from the Dazhong layer. The Dazhong stratum of the Tang harbor at Heyilu, Ningbo, is attributed to this period on account of a bowl fragment dated by inscription to the second year of Dazhong (848) as well as through stylistic features of the finds. This layer has in common with the Belitung wreck conical and rounded bowls with a *bi*-disc foot; flared, four-lobed bowls in various sizes, with flared rims and incised decoration,





LEFT

Fig. 139 Four-lobed dish with incised floral medallion. Cat. 256.

Fig. 140 Square four-lobed dish with incised floral medallion. Gold dishes of the same square shape also were found on the ship (see p. 83). Cat. 254.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

Fig. 141 Incense burners with open-work decoration. Cats. 232-234.

including some with a higher flared foot; quatrefoil-oval bowls with incised decoration; circular dishes with incised decoration; square dishes, but undecorated; boxes with plain domed covers, some with narrowed-down openings; others with incised domed covers, or with plain knobbed covers; lobed ewers; and pierced openwork incense burners (fig. 141).

The Dazhong stratum of Ningbo harbor contained many vessels with incised decoration similar to pieces from the wreck, quickly sketched, mostly with a central flower head surrounded by lotus leaves. Such incised flower-and-leaf motifs appear also on a ewer in the Shanghai Museum that bears an inscription commemorating the change of reign title from Huichang to Dazhong in 847.²⁷

Many similar styles have been discovered at various Shanglinhu kiln sites, particularly among a group of kilns operating between the late eighth and mid-ninth centuries.²⁸ At one Shanglinhu kiln site, however, circular and square dishes with engraved designs and a small box and cover with a narrowed opening have been discovered together with a fragment dated by inscription equivalent to 872. This box shape also appears to have been long-lived, as the excavation report cites a companion piece from a tomb dating to 901.²⁹ The superficial similarity of certain vessel shapes (lobed bowls, some with a high foot and basins) from the Belitung wreck to vessels from the Famensi underground treasury, which was closed in 874, is more one of function than of actual design. The Famensi Yue wares (fig. 142) display a more mature style with more developed and exaggerated shapes, and a much more refined quality overall. They clearly represent a later stage in the development.

Although Yue wares were widely distributed, both in social and geographical terms, the quantities made in the Tang dynasty still appear to have been relatively small, as quality controls were fairly strict. Wasters or faulty items are almost unknown, except from the kiln sites, and were obviously destroyed. Yue ware was a sought-after luxury commodity and, as such, avidly copied throughout southern China. The stoneware production of Zhejiang province had from early on aroused echoes in nearby provinces but mainly of much lower quality.³⁰ Kilns in Guangdong province made comparable ceramics of a lesser sort but equally suitable for burial purposes since before the Han dynasty. The rising quality of the Yue models and their new function as fine tablewares, however, highlighted the difference between the two, and by the Tang dynasty only a few Guangdong kilns were still able to compete. Many kilns concentrated instead on completely different and perhaps more lucrative production lines of lesser quality and greater quantity, such as producing functional containers for storage and shipping. The rare monochrome green-glazed vessels from the Changsha kilns, which at first glance may look very similar to Yue ware, in fact owe their opaque blue-green glazes to copper rather than iron as a coloring agent.

Tang kilns have been found in Guangdong clustered in three areas: in the east, around Chaozhou and in Meixian (Mei county); in the center, around Guangzhou; and at the western tip of the province.³¹ The information available on these sites is scant, although individual pieces recovered from the kiln sites have been published. It is the kilns in the east that made the best wares, that is, tea bowls and other tablewares comparable to Yue ware. A number of fine vessels on the wreck can be linked to the products of the Shuiche kilns in Mei county (figs. 145–146), close to the border with Fujian province, but similar wares also appear to have been created in nearby Chaozhou. They are thickly potted and of coarse-grained, pale buff stoneware, but their translucent, watery, light blue-green glazes with a prominent overall crackle can be extremely beautiful and have withstood the plight of more than a thousand years of immersion in seawater better than the much finer Yue wares. Although they were clearly made with Yue ware models in mind, neither shapes nor manufacturing methods were directly copied from Yue workshops.

Conical tea bowls with the broad flat *bi*-disc footring are fully glazed, including the footring, with three large patches reserved for the firing supports on which they were placed in the kiln. Lobed bowls with a regular footring have radiating grooves scraped from the surface rather than



Fig. 142 Yue ware bowls and a basin from the pagoda foundation of the Famensi at Fufeng, Shaanxi province, donated before 874.

indented with a tool. An attractive form peculiar to the Shuiche kilns is a jar with a short spout and two vertical lugs, a shape not known from other ceramic centers, somewhat heavily potted like the tea bowls from the same kilns, but overall well made. Although we have virtually no evidence to date these fine Guangdong tablewares, there is no reason to assume that they are not contemporary with their Yue ware counterparts. Similar bowl fragments attributed to Meixian have been found in southern Thailand.³² They appear to be rare at other sites yielding Chinese ceramics from this period, although, as fragments, they would not necessarily always be easy to distinguish from Yue ware.

A large vat in the form of a massive ovoid jar with a spout near the base, the only such example on the ship, might have come from a nearby kiln. Its elaborate, highly unusual, and imaginative incised decoration includes dragons, possibly representing guardians of the freshwater supply, and palm trees, a motif not otherwise encountered in this period. Its neck is similarly fashioned to that of the spouted Shuiche jar. A similar origin is therefore not impossible, although its very degraded glaze and stained body make any attribution difficult and may point to a lesser material.

A much larger proportion of the Guangdong wares on board consisted of similarly massive containers of coarser manufacture (see p. 193). These practical, sturdy, and dense stoneware receptacles, produced in a range of sizes, were well suited for transporting goods. With nearby Guangzhou just developing into the country's foremost trading port, where many cargos were assembled, the production of such packing containers must have been a major industry there. Merchants from all over China offered their local produce in Guangzhou, and merchants from all over Asia congregated there to import and export goods. In the Tang dynasty, the town is reputed to have harbored more than 100,000 foreign residents. During the Kaiyuan reign (713–41), the trading activity had grown to such an extent that it was considered necessary to install a superintendent of merchant shipping in the town. The Arab merchant Sulayman reports in his *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l Hind*, written in 851, that many ceramics were among the goods awaiting shipment at Khanfu, i.e. Guangzhou.³³

Tall, fairly slender storage jars with wide openings were used for transporting ceramics, particularly Changsha bowls. The method of packing small bowls, in stacks of ten or so, inside large jars is reported from finds on the beaches of Lingshui county, Hainan Island, as well as in the Pearl River Estuary, near Lingding and Hebao islands. The Song dynasty writer Zhu Yu, writing in the early twelfth century on merchant shipping in the Guangzhou region, records the loading of a merchant ship where “the greater part of the cargo consists of pottery, the small pieces packed in the larger, till there is not a crevice left.”³⁴

Many of these large packing jars are incised on the shoulder with identifying Chinese characters, inscribed sideways, parallel to the rim, to be read from above (fig. 147); a few bear Arabic inscriptions. These inscriptions—many of them presumably auspicious mottoes, such as “upright rule” (*duan zheng*), “protection forever” (*bao yong*), or “good ending” (*hao ji*); others probably names (Zhang, Wen)—may have denoted ownership of the jars and their contents. Some, such as *duan zheng*, could also designate an official position or office in the Chinese hierarchy.³⁵ The jars might have been reused during several voyages, whether they started at Guangzhou or at another southeastern port, holding different goods on the outward and return journey; but the contents might also have been sold in their containers, which would then have remained in western Asia. Jars and jar fragments of this type have come to light at some sites on the Gulf, and an example with an incised Arabic name has been reported from Siraf.³⁶

Almost all other storage jars on the Belitung wreck with more narrow openings have small spouts at the shoulder. These spouts are not well suited for pouring and, on the largest jars, are definitely unsuitable. Some of these containers were found filled with spices and other perishable goods; here the spouts may represent a kind of air vent. Medium-sized spouted jars might have been used for holding spirits, which were produced in some quantity in Guangdong. Jars of

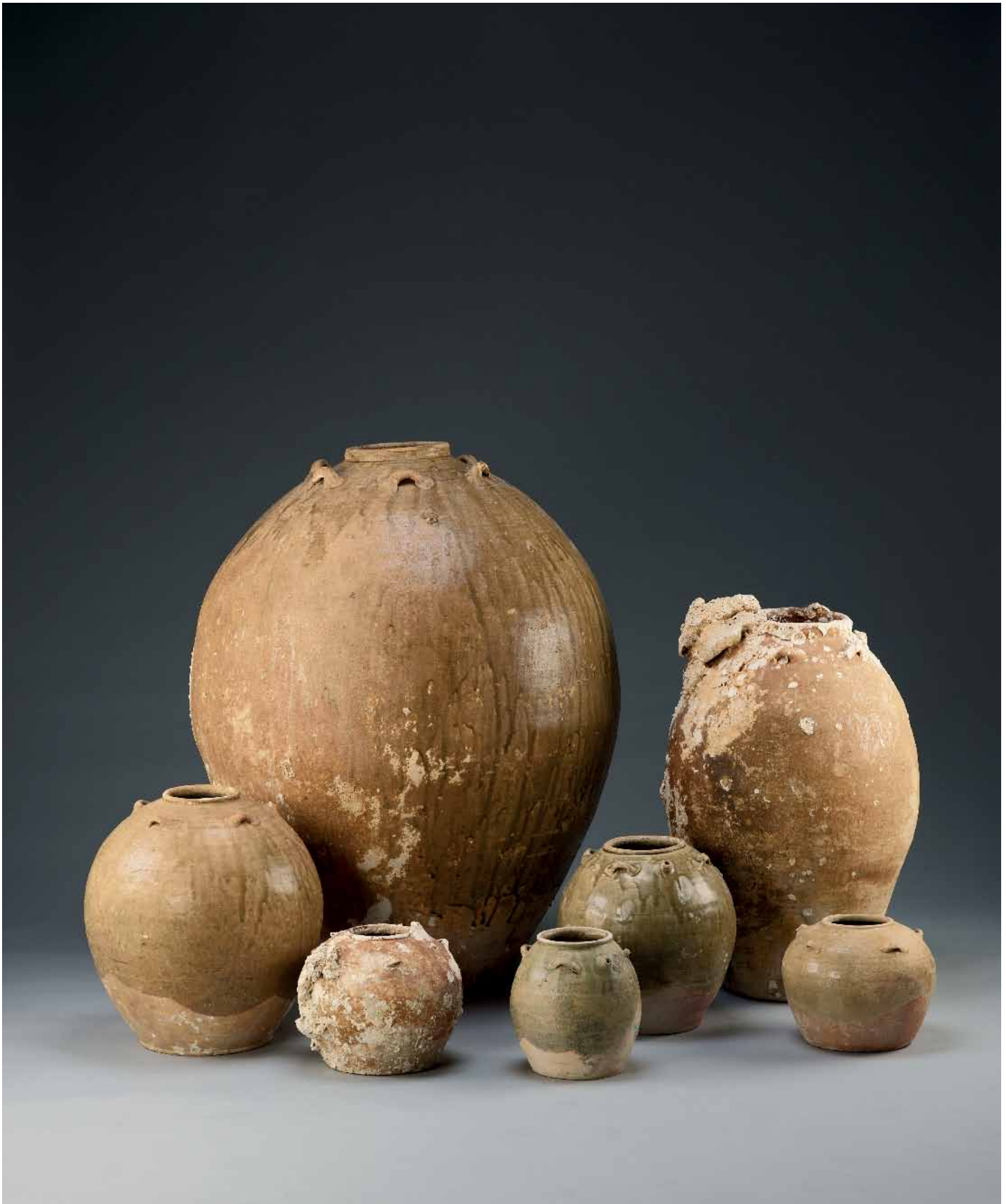


TOP

Fig. 143 Green wares from the kilns at Guangdong. The two bowls were produced in imitation of Yue wares but are much more coarsely made than genuine Yue products. The spouted jar is a typical shape from Guangdong. Cats. 257-259.

OPPOSITE

Fig. 144 Stoneware jars from Guangdong were used as containers for other goods. Cats. 42-54.



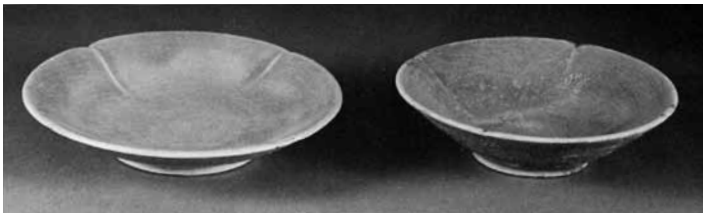
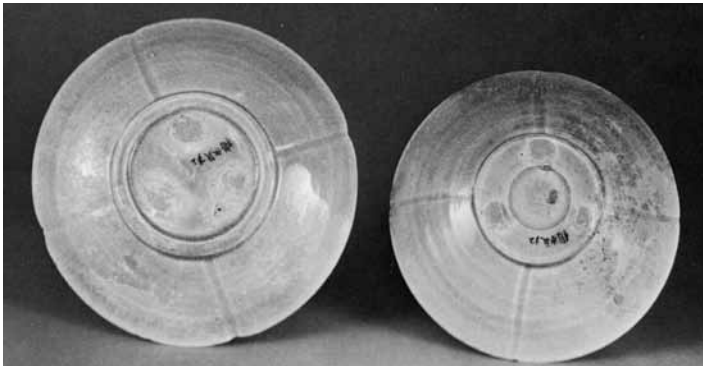


Fig. 145 Four-lobed green-glazed stoneware dish and bowl from kiln no. 2 at Shuiche, Meixian, Guangdong province.



RIGHT

Fig. 146 Four-lobed green-glazed stoneware bowls from the Shuiche kilns, Meixian, Guangdong province.

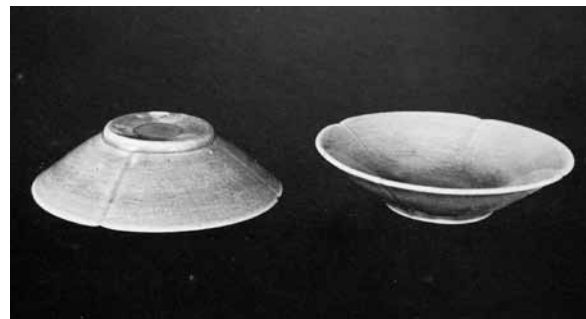


Fig. 147 Chinese inscriptions incised on large packing jars from the Belitung shipwreck. Cats. 42-43.

this size often have ink inscriptions or markings on their unglazed areas. Although the latter would appear to be less permanent, many of them resisted more than 1,000 years of exposure to seawater—an impressive demonstration of the quality of Chinese ink in the Tang dynasty.

Some very large basins may have been used in the kitchen or as wash basins. One of them bears an incised inscription including the official rank of supervisor of provisions (*langshi*), possibly of Jiangsu province (*Wu*). Some very roughly made bowls found on the wreck, featuring rounded bottoms and large knobs of clay inside from their supports in the kiln, could have been used upside-down as covers for the large jars. They also may have served as supports for the legs of kitchen cupboards, where, filled with water, they would have prevented ants from climbing up.³⁷ These coarse Guangdong jars, basins, and bowls obviously were made with utility rather than beauty in mind. Their gray stoneware bodies turned light brown to various tones of red where exposed in the kiln, while the thin glazes of yellowish to olive green cover the pieces haphazardly, forming darker streaks and drops and usually leaving the lowest part of the vessel free of glazes. They tend to shrivel, and where they adhere in a very thin layer can turn into an opaque, matte, dark-brown coating, sometimes creating an unintended but attractive mottled snakeskin effect.

The firing method for these wares was extremely basic. All items were fired in stacks, one upon the other, without enclosing saggars. Because the large jars were placed on top of each other, the rims are without glaze, and there are traces of corresponding rings on the unglazed bases. The bowls have rough patches inside and underneath, often with very thick, uneven knobs of reddish clay from the firing supports adhering to the glaze inside, which make them almost unfit for use as receptacles.

Although it is archaeologically quite firmly established that ceramic vessels of this type were made in Guangdong province, similar wares were probably produced by many southern workshops over a considerable time, and it is difficult to date and locate them precisely. A number of finds have been made in Shantou county, in the eastern part of the province. Their manufacturers were not famous, and the objects are not mentioned in literature, were rarely buried with the dead, and are not inscribed with dates. Evidence for a precise dating is thus virtually nonexistent, and since they might have been reused and may not necessarily have been brand new when loaded on board, some of these jars could predate the rest of the Belitung cargo.

The relatively small number of fine Guangdong tablewares probably makes Guangzhou a less likely port of departure of the ship than Ningbo, where very similar Yue ware has been found. Another more likely starting point is Yangzhou, one of the most magnificent cities of Tang China. Called “the jewel of China” in the eighth century, it is almost the only place in the country where some of the other ceramics from the Belitung wreck have been discovered, such as the green-splashed and blue-and-white wares, and even the Near Eastern pottery jars.³⁸ As far as dating is concerned, only comparisons of the Yue wares have so far provided some clues. These point overwhelmingly to the early Dazhong period (847–59), although a somewhat earlier date cannot be excluded.

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