

The Cham Island site yielded large numbers of *tam thai*, or three-colored wares. Blue is used under the glaze to outline and shade, and green and red are painted over the glaze. A goldlike luster painted over the transparent glaze adds special richness (figs. 5, 8). The composition of the glazes and the elements responsible for each color have undergone laboratory analysis.⁶⁸ Results show that overglaze green derives from copper dispersed in a lead-based glass, while overglaze red comes from hematite dispersed in a lead-rich flux. The goldlike luster shows two different types of metallic shine. One is a thin coating of real gold, while the other is an effect obtained by using copper in a glassy matrix, producing a luster of the type highly favored in West Asia. The published findings note that, if intentional, this would represent an important technological achievement of the fifteenth-century Vietnamese ceramic industry.⁶⁹ The mining and acquisition of necessary ores and the application and mastery of technology to produce these ceramics evidence a successful concurrence of trade and technology.

Yet, while the forms and colorations on export ceramics are a response to the cultural and aesthetic preferences of its foreign customers, the imagery is distinctly local, so the end product is imbued with various degrees of cultural fusion. The imagery can be divided into two broad categories. The first emanates from the conventional Sino-Viet regal, religious, mythical, and floral iconography (cat. no. 86j). An excellent example is a large blue-and-white dish recovered from the Cham Island site. It is painted with a writhing, four-clawed dragon that dominates the central panel. Such a design had not been encountered on ceramics, but it is similar to a dragon on a stele of King Le Thanh Tong (reigned 1460–1497) that was carved in 1498. The Ba Dinh site has since yielded quantities of blue-and-white dishes with the same dragon design, some with five claws, and these are confidently placed in the reign of Le Thanh Tong.⁷⁰ Laboratory analysis will clarify our understanding about this superior product.

Vernacular themes are also well represented: man in lotus pond, snake in lotus pond, mahout washing elephant, elephant in lotus pond, and cockfighting, as well as identifiable traditional riverine craft (figs. 5, 6). There are numerous paintings of local birds, among them the grey goose and the skylark. Aquatic creatures are abundantly represented. Seven of the nine William Dampier lists in his seventeenth-century account of the

FIG. 5

Dish with snake in lotus pond painted in underglaze blue, with red, green, and goldlike lustre over the glaze, 15th century. The overglaze colors were damaged by seawater. Cu Lao Cham shipwreck.

FIG. 6

Dish with fighting cocks, 15th century. The cock-fight was a traditional Southeast Asian pastime. Cock-fighting was witnessed in the Philippines in 1521 and recorded by Antonio Pigafetta, Ferdinand Magellan's chronicler. The overglaze colors were heavily damaged by seawater. Cu Lao Cham shipwreck.

