

86f. PARROT-SHAPED BRUSHWASHER

Cu Lao Cham shipwreck, late 15th century
Stoneware with blue underglaze, H: 4.2 cm × L: 8.2 cm
National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb 26854

86g. FROG WATERDROPPER

Cu Lao Cham shipwreck, late 15th century
Stoneware with blue underglaze, H: 4.2 cm
National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb 28082

86f. The Vietnamese were the only Southeast Asian potters to use blue underglaze on their ceramics. Their painting tended to be a bit looser than that on much of the Chinese export ware produced during the same period. Like the small frog in this exhibition, this parrot grasping a peach-shaped dish was molded and then attached to the dish that was separately molded or thrown. The mold of the parrot was detailed enough that ridges delineate the feathers, cranium, and eye of the bird; lines follow the ridges, but the painting was sufficiently distinctive on the many parrots found in this excavation that each dish takes on its own character. This parrot looks angrier than some. As in China, the peach is a symbol of longevity; the parrot appears as a decoration without any symbolic significance.

86g. The act of lustration plays an important role in Southeast Asian worship; thus, vessels for this purpose were created in a wide range of sizes and shapes. Abstract floral designs and dots decorate this small frog, which would have functioned as a waterdropper, as holes in the back and the nose indicate. An alternative use may have been to dampen a dry ink-stone to be used for writing.

The frog would have been made from a mold, like many of the objects in the Cu Lao Cham shipwreck. To my knowledge, no archaeological evidence has yet identified the kiln in northern Viet Nam where such objects were produced. Among the other charming animals made into small dishes or covered boxes were crabs and parrots. Each small frog waterdropper excavated from the shipwreck retains its own character, as the faces are variously expressive, and the outlines of legs and toes make the creatures appear to be in slightly different states of repose. The blue appears burned out on some of the dots, probably due to overfiring of the vessel.

