

Worn in Asia Minor, this is sometimes called a Phrygian hat.

86h. PHOENIX PLATE

Cu Lao Cham shipwreck, late 15th century
Chu Dau kiln, stoneware with blue underglaze, H: 6.3 cm × D: 28.2 cm
National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb 24434

86i. PLATE WITH FOREIGNER

Cu Lao Cham shipwreck, late 15th century,
Stoneware with blue underglaze, H: 5.6 cm × D: 24.5 cm
National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb 24419

86h. The clean lines of this plate are as beautifully and precisely finished as the finely drawn phoenix soaring in flight, his tail stretched behind him like a feathered kite. The clouds above the bird's head further confirm our belief that this fantastic creature will never touch earth. The quality of the line in the drawing of the bird—the strength of his chest and wings, the lightness of his soft tail feathers—could have been created only by a master artist. The spare composition of this plate may not have been the original intention of the artist, for the piece may well have been finished with overglaze greens, yellows, reds, and gold that disintegrated in the sea. But their disappearance reveals the lively hand of the artist and his swift strokes that set the wings in flight.

The entire bottom of this plate is painted with the iron oxide that early scholars first used as a primary identifying characteristic of "Annamese" ceramics. Though we cannot be certain of the significance of using this brown marker on the base of vessels, it may well have been to distinguish Vietnamese from Chinese wares.

86i. Certain motifs, such as landscapes, birds, animals, flowers, or fish, were particularly appealing to the Vietnamese artisan. Occasionally, scenes appear to depict foreigners, as is the case in this example. The artist, not as adept as the master artist who drew the phoenix (cat. no. 86b), made up for his lack of skill by an excess of imagination. A foreigner wearing a peaked hat²⁴ and heavy clothing sits astride a caparisoned horse; neither is accurately drawn. Yet the figures have a liveliness—the man with one arm outstretched while the other holds the reins—made frenetic by the clouds and reeds above their heads. Scale and verisimilitude were unimportant; the reeds, drawn much larger than horse and rider, grow at one side of the rider, and clouds flutter at the other, neither suggesting a true landscape. The loose drawing of rider and horse becomes even more cursory in the floral band on the cavetto and the free-form lotus petals on the exterior.

The lip and the foot of the plate were both left unglazed, suggesting it was stacked rim to rim, foot to foot, in the kiln. As is the case in many Vietnamese ceramics after the fourteenth century, the foot of the plate was painted with iron oxide.

