

#### THE HON DAM/PHU QUOC SHIPWRECK (FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

In May 1991, this shipwreck, which had been reported by Jeremy and Rosemary Harper at the Hongkong Conference on ceramics in 1978, was excavated by Visal's Vietnamese divers in the Hon Dam Sea off Phu Quoc Island, Kien Giang Province. Michael Flecker and Warren Blake directed the excavation.

The ship was seventeen meters deep, and some parts of it were buried by two meters of sand. It is approximately thirty meters long and seven meters wide. Its recovered cargo consists of about sixteen thousand Thai brown and celadon wares from Sawankhalok, Thailand.<sup>6</sup>

#### VIETNAMESE CERAMICS

Vietnamese ceramics have been found in some wreck sites of East and Southeast Asia, namely Dazaifu (Japan), Rang Kwian (Thailand), Turiang (Malaysia), and Pandanan (Philippines).<sup>7</sup>

It is the Cu Lao Cham wreck, however, that provided the largest number of Vietnamese wreck ceramics so far (cat. no. 86 a–o). Its 240,000 artifacts, not to mention numerous broken pieces and looted items, have demonstrated the glorious development of Vietnamese trade ceramics at that time. The richness of forms and decoration of this treasure has fascinated many people, both scholars and the general public, both Vietnamese and foreign. In fact, the Cu Lao Cham wreck's ceramics have revised the understanding of Vietnamese ceramics and enhanced the knowledge of fifteenth-century Vietnamese and Asian trade. Certainly, this source of data is still attracting more studies and discussions.

Regarding the form, most of Cu Lao Cham wreck's ceramics are utilitarian wares (containers and cooking and eating wares), except for some items of religious purpose (*kendi* and incense burners). While some forms (pots, jars, cups, boxes, and bottles) embody the Vietnamese ceramic tradition, others are new and special (pots and boxes in the shapes of dragons, phoenixes, crabs, peaches, and apricot flowers, *yuhuchun* bottles, and stem cups). Yet many of these forms also clearly reflect Chinese influences coming from Yuan or Ming porcelain.

As for decoration technique, many pieces exhibit underglaze painting with cobalt blue, and those with a combination of underglaze blue and polychrome overglaze enamels are very impressive. Two painting styles that developed specifically in the fifteenth century are remarkable: detailed painting with thin brushstrokes, and non-detailed painting with thick strokes.

Especially at that time, Vietnamese ceramics began to be decorated with gilding in combination with underglaze blue painting. A typical example of this kind is a twenty-six centimeter Yuhuchun blue-and-white bottle inlaid with gilded *bodhi* leaf-shaped panels. A question arises: is the gilding of Vietnamese origin?

Also worth mentioning are the white and very thin bowls painted with apricot flowers or with a dragon and clouds in relief, of which some, given their transparency, are close to porcelain. This kind of bowl has also been found at kilns of Chu Dau, Thang Long, and Lam Kinh (Thanh Hoa Province) in northern Viet Nam.

In 2000, according to a decision of the Vietnamese government, 10 percent of Cu Lao Cham wreck artifacts were selected and divided among the country's museums as follows: 4,362 ceramic pieces each to: the National Museum of Vietnamese History in Ha Noi, the Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City, and the Museum of Vietnamese Fine Arts