

Regina Krahl



# Green Wares of Southern China

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<sup>1</sup> Wood 2000, 19.

The ceramics recovered from the Belitung wreck included some 900 pieces of green-glazed stoneware from southern China. They are of two very different types: a smaller part represents fine tablewares, a larger part massive storage containers. The former presumably constituted a precious part of the ceramic cargo, carried on board to be sold on arrival. The latter merely provided the ‘packing cases’ for more valuable goods and were most probably not intended for sale on their own. Many of these large vessels bear identifying Chinese characters or other markings, incised or inscribed in ink, and may have been re-used for several voyages (cf. appendix IV nos 6–20).

These green wares come from two different regions in the south-east of China, Zhejiang and Guangdong. Zhejiang supplied fine tablewares only, Guangdong made both tablewares and storage containers. Until the Song dynasty (960–1279), the south-east of China was the undisputed centre for the production of green-glazed stonewares, and at the time the present pieces were made, the ceramic industry in this area had already more than two thousand years of experience. China is unique in its development of these hard, dense and extremely durable ‘green wares’, which in the West are often called ‘celadons’. Their origins can be traced to China’s bronze age, when after the middle of the second millennium BC the world’s earliest ‘high-fired’

ceramics (fired around 1200°C) were made in this region. These wares represent the ultimate predecessors of porcelain, and precede any similar production in the West by almost three thousand years.

The igneous rocks and volcanic ashes left in the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong from volcanic activity some 140 million years ago constitute highly suitable raw materials for producing fine stonewares. They can often be used more or less as mined, or else can be easily processed by levigation.<sup>1</sup> The earliest glazes on these high-fired stonewares developed naturally due to wood ash falling onto the hot vessel surface during firing, where it reacted with the clay to form a glaze. Soon after such first fortuitous appearances, proper lime glazes were created by mixing wood ash with clay slips, which could be deliberately applied.

The Yue kilns in northern Zhejiang province are the oldest kilns in China whose name has become universally associated with their products. Yue is the historical name of the region around Shaoxing, where kilns have been located since at least early historic times (the second half of the second millennium BC). In the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), the wares began to display a distinct identity, and from then on the name Yue became a synonym for fine ceramics. At the time of the Six Dynasties (222–589) the Yue kilns’

production was boosted, as nearby Nanjing had been chosen as capital by all the six dynasties which gave the period its name. Yet, in spite of the kilns' reputation and the excellent quality of their ceramics, which had no competition in China or elsewhere, Yue ware – like ceramics in general at that time – does not seem to have been greatly appreciated, neither for aesthetic nor for practical reasons, but was used mainly for burial purposes.

Related green wares of lesser quality were also made in neighbouring regions, such as Guangdong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Jiangxi and Fujian, even though few kilns of that period have as yet been located there. Only from the sixth century onwards, when the kingdoms of the north increased their power, did stonewares of comparable quality begin to be made in northern China, and the Yue production experienced a temporary setback. Examples of the late sixth and seventh century are very rare. Tombs, even in the South, were furnished with earthenwares of lesser quality, which were not only easier to make, but also more glamorous and versatile in appearance, offering a choice of bright glaze colours.<sup>2</sup>

When Yue wares reappeared in increased quantity in the eighth century, it was as wares for the living. By that time, China had a native class of discerning connoisseurs with an interest in fine utensils for daily use, as well as a sizeable inter-

national community of resident merchants with a keen interest in any products which could be exported. Both appear to have discovered China's ceramics around the same time.

Probably the first Chinese document praising the virtues of any ceramics is the *Chajing*, *The Classic of Tea*, the well-known manual on the art of tea drinking, written by the poet Lu Yu (739–804/805) between 761/2 and 777. In this treatise Lu Yu elevated the then popular consumption of tea into a ceremony to be celebrated in style, thereby probably reflecting a trend of his time. He lists and carefully describes over twenty accoutrements as the required equipment of the tea connoisseur. In discussing the relative merits of different ceramic tea bowls, he ranks Yue ware highest, a preference he explains with the observation that their blue-green glaze colour enhances the colour of the tea. In likening Yue ware to jade and Xing (white) ware<sup>3</sup> to silver, comparing Yue with ice and Xing with snow, Lu Yu passed a judgement on their beauty and expressed, perhaps for the first time, an aesthetic appreciation of ceramics.

Lu Yu's observations foreshadow an evaluation of ceramics as a desirable luxury, akin to precious metals and stones, which developed fully in the ninth century as workmanship became finer and quality increased. At that time Yue ware featured in many poems: Gu Kuang (c. 725–c. 814) com-

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Zou Houben et al. 2000, 350ff.

<sup>3</sup> For these white stonewares from Hebei province see p. 302ff. in this volume.

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<sup>4</sup> Watson 1984, 34; *Seven Thousand Years* 1994, 102; Feng Xianming 1998, 314; Mino Yutaka and Tsiang 1986, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Watson 1984, 34; Zhou Lili 1982, 277.

<sup>6</sup> Famensi 1990; *Gifts of the Tang Emperors* 1999.

pared it to jade, Xu Shen (dates unknown) to ‘autumn floods’, an expression for ‘bright eyes’; Meng Jiao (751–814) talked about the ‘lotus-leaf cavity’ of a Yue bowl; Shi Jianwu (fl. 820), mentioned it in an ode devoted to the tea from Sichuan; Lu Guimeng (died c. 881) mourned the excessive quantity of trees used to fire it (‘Robbing a thousand mountain peaks of their kingfisher-blue’); Pi Rixiu (c. 834–c. 883) compared Yue and Xing wares to the twin souls *hun* and *po*; and Xu Yin (fl. late ninth/early tenth century) praised the beauty of *mise* (‘secret colour’, a particularly fine type of Yue ware) tea bowls made to be presented to the emperor.<sup>4</sup>

The likeness to jade was suggested not only by their colour and tactility, but also because of the resonance of the high-fired stoneware body. Duan Anjie (late ninth century) recorded in 894 that during the reign of Wuzong (840–846) a certain Guo Daoyuan used twelve Yue and Xing ware bowls filled with varying amounts of water to play a musical scale – just like performances done with glasses today. Their tone is said to have surpassed that of chimes made of jade.<sup>5</sup>

The greater part of Yue wares made in the Tang dynasty (618–907) was connected with the drinking of tea. The celebration of tea was linked with Chan Buddhist ceremonies: tea was drunk during meditation, with incense burning alongside, in temples as well as in elegant houses. Tea wares are therefore usually accompanied by

incense vessels. About a century after the appearance of *The Classic of Tea* an exquisite group of tea utensils, incense vessels and *sarira* containers was donated by the imperial household to the Famen Temple in Fufeng county not far from the capital Chang’an (modern Xi’an), which contained one of the holiest Buddhist relics, a ‘finger bone’ of the Buddha.

The imperial donations included luxury objects of gold and silver, immensely rare items of glass and lavish wrappings of silk, as well as fourteen exquisite vessels of green-glazed stoneware from the Yue kilns. In a contemporary inventory of the find they are classified as *mise* (‘secret colour’) ware. Their fine and smooth body material, and glossy, tactile, translucent bright green glazes are unmatched elsewhere, and represent the very peak of the Yue ware production. The treasury containing all these items was sealed in 874.<sup>6</sup>

In the Five Dynasties period (906–960), *mise* ware of the Yue kilns is said to have been the official ware of the kings of Wu-Yue, who ruled the Zhejiang region at that time; and when the Song established a new dynasty in 960, they sent it as tribute to the Song court, hoping thus to prolong their independence. Nevertheless the kingdom soon vanished, and the kilns were eclipsed by new ones established in the north.

Although some Yue ware may thus have reached imperial tables, the greater part of the kilns’

production was not for official use. Evidence for its use in China is altogether scarce. In the Tang dynasty Yue vessels were only occasionally buried with the dead, although the kilns made some stoneware epitaphs especially for burial.<sup>7</sup> Far more important are the finds at Chinese coastal sites. Yue wares have been discovered in particular at Yangzhou in Jiangsu province and at Ningbo (former Mingzhou) in Zhejiang. The site of the Tang harbour in Ningbo, which has been particularly well researched, has yielded Yue ware sherds in four different stratified layers, with vessels closely related to those on the Belitung wreck in two of the layers, attributed, respectively, to the Yuanhe (806–820) and Dazhong (847–859) reigns.<sup>8</sup>

According to the main archaeologist of the area, Lin Shimin, the Ningbo harbour has provided a denser concentration of good quality Yue sherds than the kiln sites themselves, several hundred of which have been discovered along the Bay of Hangzhou, mainly in the Shanglinhu, Dongqianhu and Shangyu areas.<sup>9</sup> This attests to the importance of export for the Yue production, and raises the serious question of whether Yue ware was not perhaps even more in demand abroad than at home.<sup>10</sup>

The Tang authorities, who closely monitored all export from their territory, certainly do not seem to have considered ceramics valuable or rare enough to restrict their shipment abroad.

Although at that time China no longer had a monopoly on the production of silk, the export or sale to foreigners of fine silk fabrics (together with pearls, gold and other items of value) was forbidden by an edict of 714; ceramics, on the other hand, where (in the form of stonewares) China retained an absolute monopoly, are not mentioned and never seem to have been affected by any export restrictions.<sup>11</sup>

An active trade across Asia had developed already before the Tang dynasty, when the busy caravan route across Central Asia, known as the Silk Route, brought China into contact with a wide range of foreign merchants. Although Chinese ceramic vessels reached western Asia already in the fifth century, and occasionally earlier,<sup>12</sup> the opportunities for transporting them were naturally limited for merchants crossing the desert on camels. Chinese ceramics are rarely found abroad until the mid-Tang dynasty.

A proper boat traffic from the south-eastern ports of China to trading posts all across Asia and as far as Africa developed from the late eighth century onwards, and by around 800 the trade of Chinese ceramics to the Middle East seems to have been well established.<sup>13</sup> It presumably flourished particularly after 834, when an edict granted imperial protection to foreign merchants operating in Guangdong, Fujian and Yangzhou.<sup>14</sup> However, the trade was brutally brought to a halt with the sack of Guangzhou by the rebel leader Huang

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Wang Qingzheng 1996, pl. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Lin Shimin 1976; Lin Shimin 1994; Ningbo shi wenwu 1996, 243–281.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Shimin 1994, 141.

<sup>10</sup> The picture may, however, be somewhat distorted by the fact that excavation reports on domestic sites tend to be scarce in China.

<sup>11</sup> Schafer 1963, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Rougeulle 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Whitehouse and Williamson 1973, 49; Rougeulle 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Schafer 1963, 25.

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<sup>15</sup> Twitchett 1979, 740.

<sup>16</sup> Li Zi Yan and Chan Liang Zhu 1988, cat. no. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Chen Xinxiong 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Whitehouse and Williamson 1973, 48f.; Crowe 1975–77, 264f.; Rougeulle 1991. See also above pp. 68–69, 80–81.

<sup>19</sup> Changsha wares seem to be more frequently encountered in Indonesia, even though securely excavated material is also scarce. The occurrence of Changsha wares outside China is discussed in Ho Chuimei and Bronson 1987; Fleming et al. 1992; Sasaki Tatsuo et al. 1992.

Chao, who in 879 devastated the port and killed vast numbers of its foreign merchants; according to some accounts they comprised more than half of the city's population.<sup>15</sup> The voyage of the Belitung wreck thus appears to have taken place in the period of the highest trade activity, between c. 834 and 879. Thereafter, it was apparently not until the tenth century that maritime trade recovered again.

Evidence for the maritime export of Yue ware comes also from other shipwrecks, although none has been properly researched. Very similar wares are reported to have been recovered from a wreck, probably of similar date, in the sea near Ningbo in Zhejiang province, which has not been fully raised.<sup>16</sup> And over three thousand Yue ware fragments found on the Penghu archipelago between Fujian province and Taiwan derive from a ship believed to have sunk shortly after 977.<sup>17</sup>

From the late eighth or early ninth centuries onwards, Chinese ceramics appeared quite suddenly at almost all Iranian coastal sites as well as inland and, less plentifully, on the Gulf's Arabian coast, in Mesopotamia, and further west, in northern Africa.<sup>18</sup> Many of these sites may only contain somewhat later Chinese material, but 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 the ninth century onwards; Samarra

in Iraq, whose finds are believed to date largely from the period between 836 and 892, when the town was capital of the Abbasid Empire; and Siraf at the Iranian coast, among whose ceramic finds, dating from c. 800 onwards, the percentage of Chinese examples is even greater than at the other two sites. Most of the Persian and Arab sites have brought to light a similar combination of wares as were found on the Belitung wreck, yet quantitatively, Yue and other southern green wares as well as Xing and Gongxian white wares appear to have been by far the most important imports in these regions. The predominance of Changsha in relation to other wares carried on the present boat is certainly not reflected in finds from Middle Eastern sites, and it is possible that the larger part of them was meant to be offloaded elsewhere on the way.<sup>19</sup>

When the Belitung wreck set sail, Yue ware was well established in China as a ware for elegant utensils for food and drink, for medicine, incense, cosmetics, amongst other uses. Together with Xing ware it represented the finest type of ceramic available, and the choice between the two was a matter of taste rather than quality.

The Yue wares on the Belitung wreck are well made and finely finished. The potting is delicate; the body material is carefully prepared and has fired to a light grey or yellowish buff colour, and sometimes a near-white; the glaze is thinly and

evenly applied, and yellowish to olive-green, or occasionally greyish or light blue-green due to partial reduction of oxygen in the firing. Not all pieces are exactly alike in type and quality, and it is tempting to divide them into groups which might reflect the production of individual Yue kilns. The wide range of different states of preservation, however, makes such accurate comparison difficult, and in any case, the scant kiln information available from China makes specific attribution to a kiln virtually impossible.

The Yue ware shapes on board (like those of Xing ware) largely reflect Chinese rather than foreign habits and tastes, and were most probably not made to order. Only two pieces, a begonia-shaped bowl (no. 115) and a slop bowl (no. 139), are outstanding in terms of size, and could be a response to a Middle Eastern preference for large vessels. But they, too, are Chinese shapes, and what a begonia-shaped bowl of this size might have been used for is yet to be established. For most of the forms, more or less closely related versions are known in silver or gold, and some of these, probably made in a nearby region, were transported together with the ceramics on the wreck. Both metal and ceramic vessels show the predilection for lobed floral forms characteristic of the late Tang period; these are generally believed to have originated in metal, but are equally well suited to either medium. To indent a round ceramic receptacle, while still soft, with

a straight-edged tool is an easy and obvious process of shaping. When such simple indentations were eventually replaced by more exaggerated or complicated forms, however, this may well have been in response to the more distinct indentations achieved in metal. All lobed pieces are four-lobed; five-lobed ones appeared somewhat later.

Bowls and cups were used mainly for drinking, the smallest for wine (nos 117–119), larger ones for tea (nos 110, 111, 120–122, 126), and only the largest may have been used for food (nos 123–125). Drinking bowls were placed on matching stands. François Louis' suggestion that begonia-shaped gold bowls from the wreck (nos 5–7) may have been used together with square dishes (nos 3, 4) as stands (see above p. 160) could also pertain to the Yue examples, both shapes having parallels in Yue wares on the wreck. Yue ware dishes of this square type (nos 132–134) are otherwise, however, much rarer than oval bowls.

Tea was at that time not yet brewed, but instead ground to a powder and fused with hot water in a bowl, a practice not unlike that preserved in the Japanese tea ceremony until today. It was consumed more like a soup, with added spices and flavourings, and was thus drunk from larger bowls. The most classic tea bowl shape of the Tang dynasty, which was made over a long period of time and by many manufactories, is that of the conical bowl fired on a broad, shallow,

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<sup>20</sup> Lin Shimin 1994, 143f. and 166, pl. 1A and B.

<sup>21</sup> Rings of thin bar-shaped spurmarks on the base of vessels are characteristic of Yue pieces from the Five Dynasties and Song period; see sherds from the Shanglinhu kiln sites in *Koshūyō no seiji ten* 1994, no. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Sarre 1925.

ring-shaped foot with a central recess (no. 110). 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 centre. 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. The small central area of the base is generally glazed, the broad foot ring unglazed.

This distinctive type of foot, which is shaped like an archaic jade *bi* – a flat disc with a central hole used for ritual purposes – is known as a *bi*-disc foot. Its use started well before the present pieces were made, but earlier pieces were generally stacked in the kiln, without enclosing saggars, and therefore show spur marks also on

the inside.<sup>20</sup> They appear side by side with bowls fired on an ordinary foot ring, and even later ones without a foot, which were supported in the kiln on a ring of spurs only.<sup>21</sup> The wide distribution of this type of foot from Xing over Yue to Guangdong kilns, that is, roughly from modern Beijing over Shanghai to Guangzhou, reflects the remarkably active exchange of goods and techniques during the Tang dynasty. Since excavations in Samarra first brought to light bowls with this distinctive feature, the whole type has become known as Samarra-type bowls (or the foot as Samarra-type foot).<sup>22</sup>

Tea bowls were used in combination with stands, and contemporary depictions of the preparation of tea show them in use together with ewers for hot water (nos 135–137), as well as slop bowls for discarding the water with which they were rinsed



**Fig. 1** Silver basin for the preparation of medicines from a Tang hoard at Hejiacun near Xi'an, Shaanxi province (after Chutu wenwu 1972, 64 top).

to warm them up (nos 138, 139). Boxes were used for holding tea as well as other provisions (nos 148–150), and dishes for offering sweet meats or other relishes (nos 128, 129, 130, 131). *The Classic of Tea* also mentions a dish or other type of vessel, such as a bottle or jar, for holding salt, which was added to the tea water (perhaps no. 145).

Tea was drunk for pleasure, but also for its benevolent influence on one's health, and other remedies were prepared in a similar way. Larger boxes served as containers for various medicines (no. 147), while wide basins with pairs of lugs to attach handles were presumably used to prepare them by boiling or infusing (no. 144), as was the case with similarly shaped items in silver (fig. 1).<sup>23</sup> Incense vessels are often found together

<sup>23</sup> Compare three silver basins from the Hejiacun hoard excavated near Xi'an in Shaanxi province, which were among a larger group of items used in connection with medicine; see Chutu wenwu 1972, 64; Zhongguo lishi bowuguan 1997, vol. 3, pl. 168; Shaanxi sheng bowuguan 1972, 31 and 39, fig. 21.

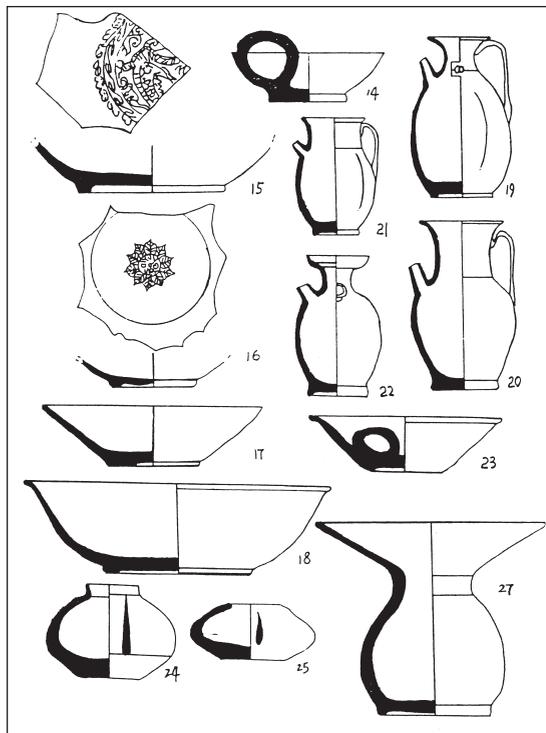


Fig. 2 Yue wares from the Yuanhe (806–820) stratum of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province (all, except no. 14) (after Lin Shimin 1994, 157).

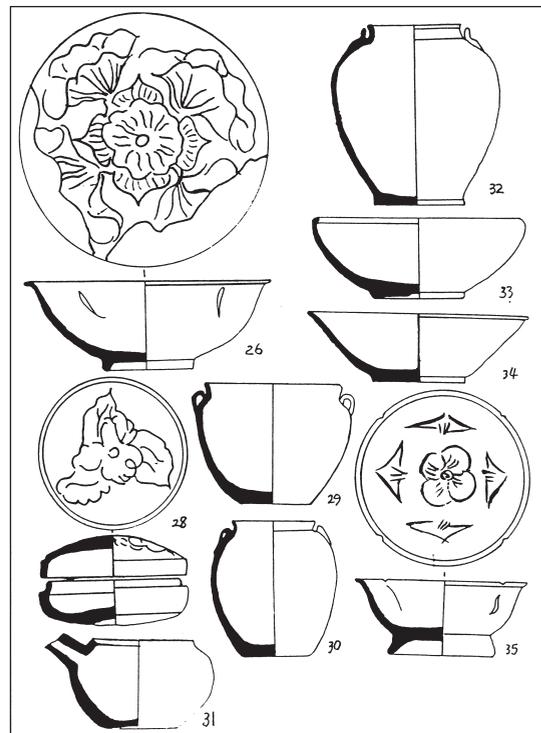


Fig. 3 Yue wares from the Yuanhe (806–820) (nos 26, 28–32) and Dazhong (847–859) (nos 33–35) strata of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province (after Lin Shimin 1994, 158).

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with tea utensils, although Yue ware censers of the types discovered here (nos 151–154) are otherwise rarely seen.

Wine was drunk from smaller cups (nos 117–119), which also had matching stands, and poured from bottles with a narrow opening (nos 140, 141). The Yue ware wine bottles found on the wreck could be carried on a strap, which may

also have been used for fastening a stopper (no. 142). The exact purpose of the distinctive twin-fish flask (no. 143), a shape made by a number of kilns at the time, is still unknown.

Decoration does not seem to have been of particular importance at the Yue kilns during this time, and many Yue ware vessels on the Belitung wreck are undecorated, although there are

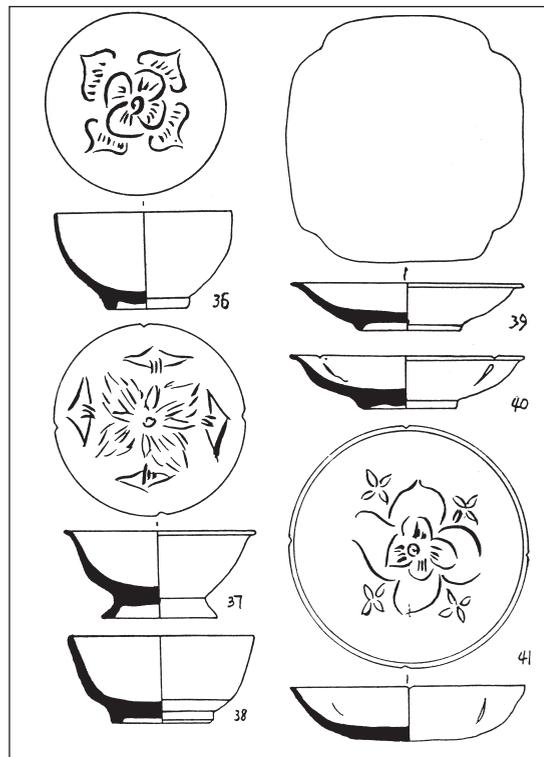


Fig. 4 Yue wares from the Dazhong (847–859) stratum of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province (after Lin Shimin 1994, 159).

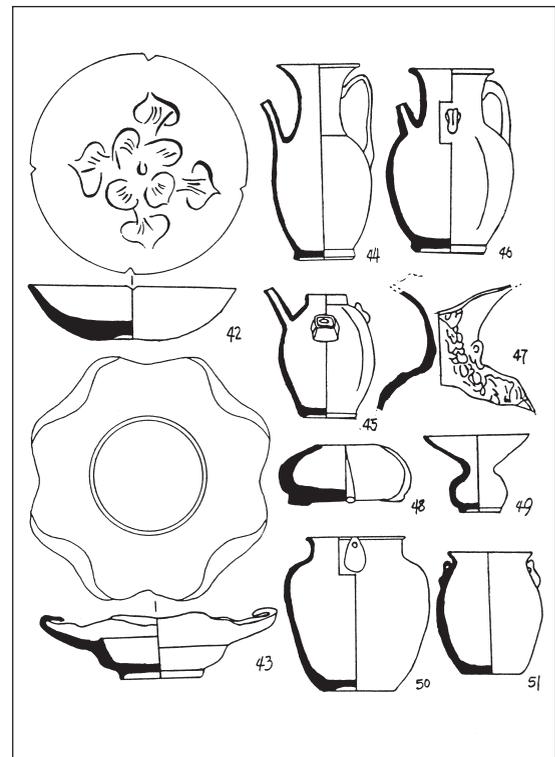


Fig. 5 Yue wares from the Dazhong (847–859) stratum of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province (after Lin Shimin 1994, 160).

examples of incising, practised with a fine tool, sometimes with a more deeply carved outline (cf. appendix V). Like the forms, the designs, too, show connections to contemporary silver. More painterly incised designs, such as parrots, butterflies or figurative subjects, and lotus petals carved in relief, as well as incised cyclical dates, appear rather late in the Tang dynasty and are not represented on the Belitung wreck.<sup>24</sup>

None of the Yue wares on the Belitung wreck are dated, but many of them (nos 110–113, 117, 120, 127, 132–136, 138, 144, 145, 148–153) bear a close relationship to Yue wares excavated from the stratified site of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province, where similar vessels were discovered in strata attributed to the Yuanhe (806–820) and Dazhong (847–859) reigns (figs 2–6).<sup>25</sup> While some stylistic features

<sup>24</sup> They belong to the latest period of Yue production and can be seen, for example, among the finds from Penghu archipelago which date from around 977; see Chen Xinxiong 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Lin Shimin 1976 and 1994; Ningbo shi wenwu 1996.

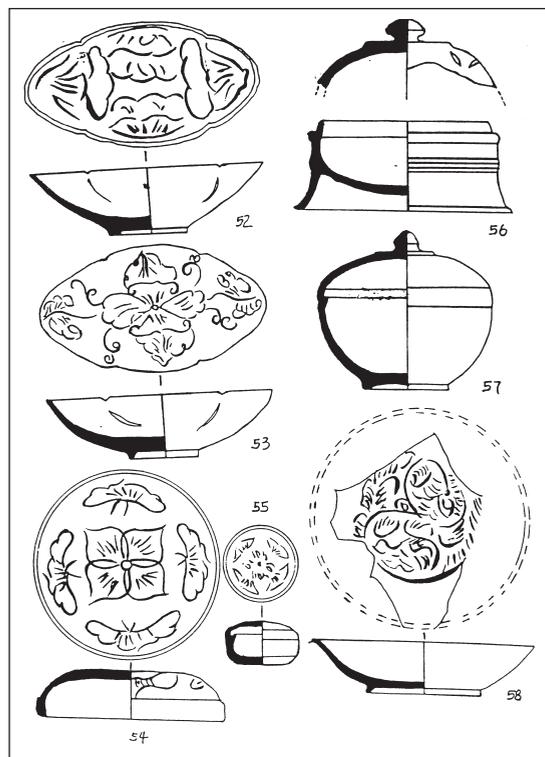


Fig. 6 Yue wares from the Dazhong (847–859) stratum of the Tang harbour at Heyilu, Ningbo, Zhejiang province (all, except no. 58) (after Lin Shimin 1994, 161).

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<sup>26</sup> The catalogue entries have accordingly been dated either 'early to mid-ninth' or just 'mid-ninth century'.

<sup>27</sup> Lin Shimin 1999, pl. 36, fig. 129; Ningbo shi wenwu 1996, 244f.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Qingzheng 1996, pl. 12; Lin Shimin 1999, pl. 35, fig. 125.

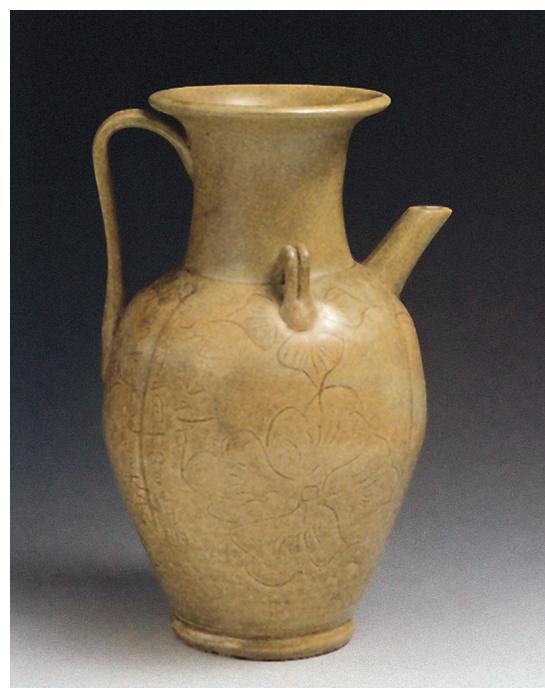
continue and are present in both strata, others are found only in the later one.<sup>26</sup> The Dazhong stratum contained many shapes and designs also present on the wreck and is likely to be very close in date. It is attributed to this period on account of a bowl fragment (fig. 7) dated by inscription to the second year of Dazhong (848), as well as through stylistic features of the finds.<sup>27</sup> A similar date for the Yue wares on the Belitung wreck is suggested by close similarities between the in-

cised designs on several pieces from the wreck (nos 112, 114, 118–122, 129–134, 140, 141, 148, 149; appendix V nos 1, 10) and those on a ewer in the Shanghai Museum (fig. 8), which bears an inscription commemorating the change of reign title from the seventh year of Hui-hang to the first year of Dazhong in 847.<sup>28</sup>

At first glance, certain vessel shapes (nos 123–127, 144) on the Belitung wreck seem to show a



**Fig. 7** Yue ware bowl fragment from Ningbo harbour, Zhejiang province, dated by inscription 'Dazhong second year' (848). Tianyige Museum, Ningbo (after Zhejiang sheng bowuguan 2000, pl. 166).



**Fig. 8** Yue ware ewer, dated by inscription to the first year of Dazhong (847). Shanghai Museum (after Wang Qingzheng 1996, pl. 12).

connection to vessels from the Famensi of pre-874 (figs 9–11). That similarity, however, is more one of function than of design, the latter vessels displaying a far more mature style with more developed and exaggerated shapes, and a much refined quality. They clearly represent a later stage in the development. Stylistic comparisons therefore suggest a date before or around the middle of the ninth century for the Yue wares on the Belitung wreck.

Although Yue wares were so widely distributed, both in social and geographical terms, the quantities made in the Tang dynasty still appear to have been relatively small and quality controls fairly strict. Wasters or faulty items are, except from the kiln sites, almost unknown and were obviously destroyed. Yue ware was a sought-after luxury and as such avidly copied throughout southern China.<sup>29</sup> The stoneware production of Zhejiang province had from early on aroused

<sup>29</sup> Yue-type sherds from Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province, Yixing in Jiangsu, and Shangyu in Zhejiang are compared in Wood 1999, 33; the Changsha kilns of Hunan copied Yue wares both with yellowish-green Yue-type and with dark copper-green glazes; examples of both have been discovered on the wreck, e.g. nos 226–228, 233, 234, 259, 260, 263.



**Figs 9–11** Yue ware bowls and basin from the pagoda foundation of the Famensi at Fufeng, Shaanxi province, before 874 (after Wang Qingzheng 1996, pls 6, 4 and 7).

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30 *Ceramic Finds* 1985 4–7 (maps), and 16 (list of kiln sites).

echoes in nearby provinces. Kilns in Guangdong province had made comparable ceramics of lesser quality but equally suitable for burial purposes since before the Han dynasty. The rising quality of the Yue prototypes and their new function as fine tablewares, however, made the difference between them and these Guangdong wares more apparent, and by the Tang dynasty only a few Guangdong kilns were still able to compete, making fine tea bowls or other tablewares of comparable appeal. Other kilns concentrated instead on a completely different and perhaps more lucrative production line, by producing in large quantities purely practical containers for storage and shipping.

Twenty-two Tang kilns have so far been located in Guangdong, clustered in three areas: in the east, around Chaozhou and in Mei county; in the centre, around Guangzhou; and at the western tip of the province.<sup>30</sup> None of them has been

properly excavated yet, although pieces have been recovered from the kiln sites. It is the kilns in the east that made the best wares. A number of fine Yue-type tablewares on the wreck can be attributed to the Shuiche kilns in Mei county (nos 155–159), close to the border with Fujian province (figs 12–14), but similar wares also appear to have been produced in nearby Chaozhou. They are thickly potted, of a coarse-grained pale buff stoneware, and covered with a translucent, watery, light blue-green glaze with a prominent overall crackle, which can be extremely beautiful. They were clearly made with Yue ware models in mind, although the similarities are superficial. Not all of their shapes are borrowed from the Yue manufactories and those which are, are often fashioned in a different way.

Unlike most Yue wares, conical tea bowls with a broad flat foot ring in the shape of a jade *bi*-disc were in the kiln placed on firing supports

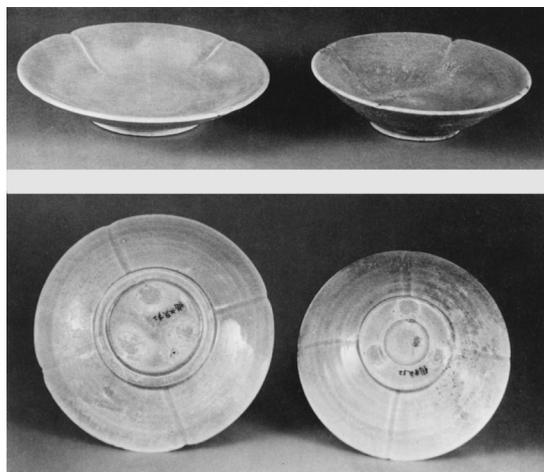


Fig. 12 Green-glazed stoneware dish and bowl with lobed sides. From kiln no. 2 at Shuiche, Meixian, Guangdong province (after Lam 1985–86, pl. 93).



Fig. 13 Green-glazed stoneware bowls from the Shuiche kilns, Meixian, Guangdong province (after *Ceramic Finds* 1985, pl. 78).

for which large unglazed patches were reserved on the glazed foot ring (nos 155, 156). Another type of bowl, fired on a regular foot, has radiating grooves on the outside which were not indented with a straight tool, but scraped into the surface (no. 157). Although we have virtually no evidence to date such bowls, there is no reason to assume that they are not contemporary with their Yue ware models.

A characteristic Shuiche form is the jar with a short spout and two vertical lugs, a shape not known from other manufactories (no. 158 and fig. 4). It is very similar in quality to the tea bowls (nos 155–157) from the same kilns, well made, if somewhat heavy, and very beautiful to look at. Possibly also belonging to this group is a large vat in the form of an ovoid jar with a spout near the base (no. 160), the only such example on the ship; unfortunately, it has a very degraded glaze and a stained body, which makes attribution difficult.

Its elaborate and imaginative incised decoration (cf. line drawing, p. 446) includes dragons, possibly representing guardians of the fresh water supply, and palm trees, a most unusual motif not otherwise encountered in this period. Its neck is very similarly fashioned to that on the spouted jar above, but on its own this piece would be difficult to date or locate.

A much larger proportion of the Guangdong wares on board consisted of similarly massive containers of coarser manufacture (cf. no. 161). 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 cargoes were assembled, the production of such packing containers would have been a major industry. Merchants from all over China offered their local produce in Guangzhou, and merchants from all



Fig. 14 Green-glazed stoneware ewer fragment from the Shuiche kilns, Meixian, Guangdong province (after *Ceramic Finds* 1985, pl. 73).

# Green Wares of Southern China

31 Ferrand 1922.

32 Yang Shaoxiang in *Ceramic Finds* 1985, 22 and 26f.

over Asia congregated there to import and export goods. In the Tang dynasty the town is reputed to have harboured over 100,000 foreign residents. During the Kaiyuan reign (713–741) the trading activity had grown to such an extent that it was considered necessary to install a superintendent of merchant shipping in the town. That many ceramics were among the goods awaiting shipment at Khanfu, i.e. Guangzhou, is reported by the Arab Sulayman in his *Journey to the East*, written in 851.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the Guangdong storage jars on the Belitung wreck were found filled with spices and other perishable goods, but the large ones were mainly utilized to hold stacks of more valuable ceramics from other kilns, in particular bowls from Changsha. It is largely due to these massive jars that the Changsha bowls on the wreck have on the whole survived in good condition (see p. 23, figs 30, 31). This method of packing small bowls, generally in stacks of ten, inside

large jars is also reported from finds on the beaches of Lingshui county, Hainan Island, as well as in the Pearl River Estuary, near Lingding and Hebao Islands, and the Song writer Zhu Yu 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’.<sup>32</sup>

Many of these large packing jars have a Chinese character incised on the shoulder, inscribed sideways, parallel to the rim (fig. 15; cf. also appendix IV nos 10–20), to be read from above. Medium-sized jars have ink inscriptions or markings on their unglazed part (cf. appendix IV nos 6–9). Although the latter would appear to be less permanent, many of them resisted more than one thousand years of exposure to sea water – an impressive demonstration of the quality of Chinese ink in the Tang dynasty. These inscriptions, often names, presumably denoted ownership of the jars and their contents. The jars might have



**Fig 15** Chinese character incised parallel to the rim of a large packing jar from the Belitung wreck (Photograph courtesy of Seabed Explorations).

been reused during several voyages, whether they started at Guangzhou or another south-eastern port, such as Yangzhou or Ningbo, or the contents might 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 various sites on the Persian Gulf.<sup>33</sup>

Some very roughly made bowls found on the wreck (nos 168–170) may have been used upside down as covers, for sealing the large jars. Medium-sized spouted globular jars for liquids (nos 162–164) might have been used for holding spirits, which were produced in Guangdong and elsewhere. These coarse Guangdong jars, basins and bowls (nos 161–170) were obviously made with utility rather than beauty in mind. Their grey 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 irregularly, forming darker streaks and drops and usually leaving the lowest part of the vessel free; they tend to shrivel, and where they adhere in a very thin layer can turn into an opaque, matt dark brown coating, thus sometimes creating an unintended, attractive mottled-snakeskin effect (nos 161, 164).

The firing method for these wares was extremely basic. All items were fired in stacks, one upon the other, without enclosing saggars. Because the

jars were placed on top of each other, the rims are without glaze and there are traces of a corresponding ring on the unglazed base. The bowls have rough patches inside and underneath (nos 168–170), often with very thick uneven knobs of reddish clay from the firing supports adhering to the glaze inside, which make them virtually unsuitable 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 manufactories over a considerable time, and it is difficult to date and locate them precisely. They are often attributed to the eastern part of the province, to Shantou county, where a number of finds have been made, but might also have been made at other Guangdong kilns.<sup>34</sup> Their manufactories were not famous, they are not mentioned in the literature and they were not praised in poems, they were only rarely buried with the dead, and they are not inscribed with dates. Although there seems to be no reason for dating them differently from the rest of the cargo, evidence for a precise dating is virtually non-existent. Since they might have been reused, they were not necessarily brand-new when loaded on board, and could even slightly predate other vessels on the Belitung wreck.

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<sup>33</sup> Rougeulle 1991, 16–21.

<sup>34</sup> Lam 1985–86, pls 86, 89.