

A REASSESSMENT OF THE ANNAMESE WARES

by

C. Nelson Spinks

Very little has been researched and published on that large body of Southeast Asian ceramics commonly known as Annamese wares. There are relatively few pieces of these wares in the more well known museums and private collections. Sufficient information on them has now been developed, however, from recent finds in Indonesia and the Philippines to warrant some comment on them and to speculate on their overall place in the Southeast Asian ceramic spectrum.

For the most part, the Annamese wares reflect strong and unmistakable Chinese influences, representing part of that general sinofied overlay found in Vietnamese culture. This point is particularly true of Annam and Tonkin, the more northern parts of Vietnam, because of their close proximity to southern China and their long and close cultural, economic and political relations with the Chinese. In their ceramic work, the Annamese potters expressed in their own native way some of the styles and techniques of the potters of Kiangsi in China.¹

-
- 1) Succinct and accurate accounts of the Annamese wares are found in John Alexander Pope, *Chinese Porcelains in the Ardebil Shrine* (Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1956, pp. 103-05; William Bower Honey, *The Ceramic Art of China and Other Countries of the Far East* (New York : American Edition, The Beachhurst Press, 1954), pp. 164-66; and the helpful comments of Soame Jenyns in his *Ming Pottery and Porcelain* (American Edition, New York : Pitman Publishing Company, n. d., *passim*: Annamese wares found in the Philippines have been discussed at length by Cecilia and Leandro Locsin, on the basis of their extensive excavations of pre-Spanish burial sites in the Philippines, in their *Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan : Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1967, *passim*; another excellent account of Annamese wares, based largely on finds in Indonesia, is E.W. Van Orsoy de Flines, *Guide to the Ceramic Collection (Foreign Ceramics)* Djakarta : Museum Pusat Djakarta, the English translation of the original work written in Dutch, that was published in 1969, pp. 59-68. The most detailed account of Annamese wares, but with some errors and misconceptions, is the work of a noted Japanese ceramic specialists, Okuda

Even less research has been undertaken or published, however, concerning the kilns that produced the Annamese wares, or on their potting, glazing and firing techniques. We do know, however, that these kilns were located in the general area around Hanoi in Tonkin. For example, at Thanh Hoa, about 175 kilometres south of Hanoi, there were, and presumably still are, excellent deposits of kaolin and feldspar, while other deposits of these essential ceramic materials were also available in and around Trieu, some 52 kilometres west of Hanoi on the main road to the seaport of Haiphong.²

Many Annamese wares of a great variety of types were produced for local use, and presumably are still made today, at the village of Huang-canh, about 47½ kilometres northeast of Hanoi on the main road to Viet-tri. There was also a large pottery village at Tho-ha, four kilometres from the provincial capital of Bac-ninh, itself some 30 kilometres northeast of Hanoi. Bac-ninh was also of significance for its ceramic production. In fact, its principal factory was first built in 1465 A.D., reportedly by Chinese potters who came to Bac-ninh from Lau-khé. According to Vietnamese legend, Lau-khé was also where the first mainland Chinese potter, one Hoang Quang Hung, allegedly settled in the 3rd century B.C., thereby instituting the potters' craft in Annam. The first ethnic Vietnamese potters is said to have been one Truong Trung Ai who also settled at Lau-khé.

Another important pottery center in Annam is Bat-trang, the name of which literally means "Pottery Factory." This site is at a town only about 10 kilometres due south of Hanoi on the Red River and on the road to Ninh-binh and Than-hoa. This center is said to have been established

Sei-ichi, *Annam Tōji Zenshū*, ("Annamese Pottery,"), Tokyo: Zauho Press, 1954. More recently, a scholarly and critical account of the Annamese wares was prepared by William Willetts and published in his *Ceramic Arts of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: The Southeast Asia Ceramic Society, 1971) pp. 9-1 and "Descriptive Notes," pp. 30-48, with Plates Nos. 21-48, which offer some photographs of excellent examples of Annamese wares.

2) Willetts, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

by potters who migrated to this site from Bo-bat, a village in Ninh-binh province, some time between 1527 and 1533 A.D. This large ceramic complex at Bo-bat appears to have been in continuous operation from the time of its establishment until recent years. Its supplies of feldspar came from Than-hoa. It was an enormous complex, and it was said that great stacks of firewood for its many kilns stood out conspicuously on the skyline long before travellers could make out the actual town of Bat-trang. As Mr. Willetts has noted, this town might well be called the Ching-tê-chên of Annam, while the famous French *Guide Madrolle* also noted that most of Bat-trang's manufacturing processes and techniques were adopted from those employed at the great Chinese ceramic center at Ching-tê-chên.

If Bat-trang were indeed founded in the mid-16th century, it could not possibly have been a production center during the 15th and 14th centuries. Bat-trang did produce, however, much of the ultra-fine under-glaze blue porcelains that have been ranked by some critics with the best Chinese work of the Ming Period. Consequently, such work must be dated from the 16th century a suggestion that is further supported by the forms of some of the Bat-trang wares. In his well known monograph on the so called "chocolate base" Annamese wares, a Bat-trang piece is cited to the year 1625, but with no further reference or comment.³

During the period 1400-1428, Annam was occupied by the Chinese, the consequences of which had far-reaching effects on Annamese ceramic wares. The traditional blue and white wares and the closely related so-called "blue-and-whites" with their on-glaze painted enamel decoration came into vogue and had a remarkable flowering. According to Mr. Willetts, these wares "are about all that the ceramic world knows or understands by the term 'Annamese'." Instead, Mr. Willetts has sensibly divided the Annamese wares into the following seven principal categories, based on differences in their decoration and the types of colored glazes that were used on the monochromes :

3) Lefebre d'Argencé, "Les céramiques à base chocolatée au Musée Louis Finot de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient à Hanoi," Paris : 1958.

1. Wares decorated in underglaze blue;
2. Wares enameled in dark, tomato red applied on the biscuit;
3. Wares decorated in underglaze blue but also having on-glaze decoration of tomato red and leaf green enamels;
4. Wares decorated in underglaze iron-black pigment;
5. Cream colored monochrome wares;
6. Green glazed monochrome wares; and
7. Brown glazed monochrome wares.

Among the blue-and-white wares are many large *phān* type offering trays, along with similar medium sized pieces; large *yü-hu-ch' un* bottle-vase types; baluster-shaped vessels for altar use; open bowls with everted rims, covered boxes (*po-kang*) miniature jars and *amphorae*, miniature vessels with moulded sides, small, circular covered bowls and other covered pieces some of which are in such zoomorphic forms as fish and crabs, together with ewers, *kěndi*-type water droppers, smaller globular jars, some with and others without ring handles, and a great variety of ceramic figurines. "In general," as Mr. Willetts has noted, "the blue and whites are all enclosed within the classical Chinese repertory of vessel shapes."⁴ Among the underglaze iron-black wares and the three monochrome types listed above, the shapes are more original, perhaps reflecting more local Annamese tastes and style preferences.

Among the more frequently encountered cream-colored monochromes, however, bowls, jarlets and beakers, some with S-shaped profiles, predominate. The apple-green copper glazed wares include cup-like bowls with verticle impressed ribs on their outer sides, miniature jars with moulded sides, as also found among the "blue-and-whites", together with flat, circular covered boxes, saucer-like dishes usually having a biscuit ring around their medallion-like central decoration, and beaker types which are also found among the iron-black glazed decorative group. In this category, however, are also found superbly sculptured covered boxes in interesting zoomorphic forms, such as the crab type.

The brown glazed wares include beakers, saucer-like small dishes, bowls, Chinese-type *yü-hu-ch' un* vases, and water droppers, although the

4) Willetts, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

true provenances of some examples of the last two groups are perhaps less certain.

The materials used in making all these categories of wares was a fine, smooth, homogenous paste of a putty color that is usually visible on the bases and footrims of the pieces, the bases of which are recessed no more than a millimetre or two below the surface of the footrims.

At this point, it should be further noted that the footrims of most of the Annamese wares are very neatly and carefully made, the outer side of the footrim being skilfully chamfered at its junction with the outside of the vessel, while the inside of the footrim is similarly chamfered with the underside of the piece. Footrims were frequently left in biscuit, but on the bowls and large and medium size *phān*-type offering trays, the inner side of the footrim and sometimes the entire base of the piece have been covered with a slip that appears to have been applied while the vessel was still on the wheel, so that the slip shows signs of a spiral motion. Moreover, it is evident that the slip was sometimes applied by a brush after the vessel had been removed from the wheel and placed face down on top of it. The slip is almost invariably of a chocolate brown color, while the glazes are usually of an oatmeal or gum color.

Beakers of the underglaze iron-black type, or the cream colored types, clearly show that they were fired one inside the other, each piece separated by a circular disc-shaped pontil or stand, usually having six projecting legs. Hence, six spur marks almost invariably appear on the inside bottoms of each piece. There is perhaps evidence here of some sort of connection between these Annamese wares and those of the Sukhōthai kilns of the Thai, where precisely the same sort of disc-type stand was employed in the same manner, but each pontil having only five instead of six legs.

Mr. Willetts and others, including the present author, have referred to a possible connection between the Annamese wares and those of the Sukhōthai potters who worked in the painted-ware form, perhaps most

manifest in their common use of the disc-shaped stands with projecting legs. The relationship becomes even more evident, however, in comparing certain decorative elements on the two wares, especially the manner of their execution, placement, and orientation.

In his splendid catalogue of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society's exhibition in Singapore in 1971, Mr. Willetts cites pieces of Annamese and Sukhōthai ware that clearly show these obvious, albeit, at times, subtle, resemblances. For examples, Mr. Willetts' Plates Nos. 102 to 110 are Annamese pieces that could easily be mistaken for fine examples of Sukhōthai ware, the large plates having very similar border decoration around their rims, and floral, medallion-type designs on their centers that closely resemble the styles, techniques and manner of execution, as well as decoration placement, found on the large Sukhōthai plates and bowls. Again, the Annamese beakers shown by Mr. Willetts in the Plates Nos. 101, 103, 105, and 106 all have a truly Sukhōthai-esque quality about them and their painted decorations, the Annamese plates closely resembling the Sukhōthai piece illustrated in Plate No. 148 of this Catalogue. Mr. Willetts calls special attention to the manner in which some of the leaves in the floral decorations shown on these Annamese ware pieces, particularly with respect to the curled leaves and leaf-tips, citing a Thai bowl sherd that appeared in Plate No. 31-A of Rām's article on the Kālong kilns of Chiangrāi Province in northern Thailand.⁵

Thus, as Mr. Willetts has concluded :

If we admitted the existence of the relationship, then we must ask the question: which tradition influenced which? Bearing in mind the fact that Sukhothai was already established by the year 1300 and had but a short lease on life, and that the main Annamese blue-and-white series began no earlier than the end of the 14th

5) See Phrayā Nakhon Pra Rām, "Tai Pottery," *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. XXIX, Part 1, 1935, pp. 13-36, with one map, one plan and 55 Plates, based on a paper Praya Rām delivered before a meeting of the Siam Society in Bangkok on December 10, 1935

century or the beginning of the 15th century, then if other Annamese groups are contemporary with the blue-and-whites, Sukhothai must clearly have influenced Annam. But taking into account the rudimentary state of Sukhothai ceramic technology, which we shall, the opposite would have seemed more likely to have been the case. . . . Accordingly, the Annamese iron-black wares, together with the copper green, cream and brown monochromes, and a few pieces decorated in underglaze blue. . . . belong to the older phase of Annamese output. . . . Granted a date in the later 13th or earlier 14th century for the Chinese blue-and-whites, then the Annamese iron-black wares must on this basis be their near contemporaries⁶:

As noted, however, there has been a strong Chinese influence in the Annamese wares, as in other aspects of Annam's culture. The ceramic wares, of course, had exceedingly close ties with South China, but as Baron Van Orsoy de Flines has noted, "unfortunately, we know very little about the many groups of Chinese merchants and artisans who went back and forth between the two countries, but that they, too, made a strong impression on the handicrafts and arts, not the least the pottery, is undeniable."⁷

The Annamese wares made prior to 1400 often have flat and sometimes concave bases, undoubtedly the results of warping while being fired. In the 15th and 16th centuries, however, most pieces of Annamese wares have footrims of varying heights and widths, being comparatively high on the smaller vessels and jars, while the footrims on the larger pieces are usually rather low and quite broad. The bases of such pieces, however, are carefully finished with the footrims neatly and accurately cut. Dishes generally have rather thick footrims, rounded on their tops.⁸

6) Willetts, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Mr. Willetts' rather confused and convoluted statement seems to miss the point that the real resemblance between the Annamese wares and those of the Thai Sukhōthai kilns is to be found almost entirely in their respective painted wares that followed closely the Chi-tz'u and Ts'u-chou Chinese traditions.

7) E.W. Van Orsoy de Flines, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 66.

The late Baron Van Orsoy de Flines believed that the greater part of the Annamese blue-and-white wares dates from the 14th, 15th and early 16th centuries. During this long period many significant changes can be detected in the manner and styles of Chinese porcelains made immediately after 1400. Almost without exception, the decorations on the backs of dishes and the sides of jars consist of the lotus-petal panels, the so-called "gadrooms" but with great variety in the manner and shapes of their execution "with the earlier pieces, the work is done with considerable grace and artistry, but by the middle of the above period the brush strokes become increasingly fine and almost linear, with a rigidity and stiffness that is unattractive, while by the end of this long period, the pieces are again decorated more freely but at times with a carelessness that borders on untidiness."⁹

Many of the later 16th century Annamese dishes and plates have an unattractive, watery, light-green glaze, sometimes with a minute crackle, a glaze that is often mistakenly called celadon. Some of these monochrome pieces also have a rather stiff incised underglaze decoration, usually of a floral or lotus-petal panel motif. On the bases of such pieces inside the footrims there is usually a neat, unglazed ring band about two cms. in width, which is covered with a brown pigment slip, as is also found on some of the Annamese blue-and-whites.¹⁰ Some of the Annamese decorated wares also have an unglazed ring band with a brown pigment slip around the center of the piece, which frames the medallion-like central decoration.

Plate No. 1 of the present article shows an unusually large Annamese jar, approximately 70 cms. in height, its decoration depicting a Southeast Asian hunting scene. Both the shoulder and the foot of this jar are encircled with typical Annamese-style lotus-petal panels painted in considerable detail.¹¹

9) *Ibid.*, p. 67.

10) *Ibid.*, p. 68.

11) This picture originally appeared in the present writer's article, "Siam and the Pottery Trade of Asia," *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. XLIV, Part 2, August, 1956, pp. 61-111, where it was mistakenly identified as a Chinese jar. With

Plates Nos. 2 and the bottom picture of Plate No. 3 show the bases of two Annamese plates with similar lotus-petal panels encircling the outer sides. The top photograph in Plate No. 2 is the underside of the piece illustrated in the upper photograph of Plate No. 3. Plate No. 4 shows a fine example of an Annamese underglaze blue bowl, the floral decoration of which is executed with considerable skill and artistry. This piece is also a good example of the Annamese potters' effective use of the classical Chinese *lieu-tz'u*, or lotus pod, bowl form. Plate No. 15 is an exquisite piece from the noted Annamese ceramic collection of Mr. Dean Frasché, a small Annamese underglaze blue painted ware jar with four ears. The lower piece on Plate 15 is an example of an Annamese "celadon" bowl with incised underglaze decoration in a lotus-petal design.

Finally, attention should be directed to the series of Plates depicting large Annamese ware dishes (Plates Nos. 9 to 13), all of which are strikingly similar to Sukhōthai ware large decorated plates with their simple rim decorations and their medallion-like central floral designs, framed within simple circular bands. It is specially significant, I believe, that all of these unique Annamese ware large plates were found in Indonesia by Mr. Edward Masters, a United States Foreign Service Officer, who was stationed there for several years. I would hazard the guess, therefore, that such pieces may have been purposely made by the Annamese potters in imitation of Sukhōthai ware, which at the time apparently enjoyed considerable popularity in Indonesia, judging by the large numbers of Sukhōthai pieces that have been found there.

The Annamese pieces illustrated in the top photograph of Plates 5 and in Plates 6, 7, and 8 are all fine examples of the ever-popular miniature covered boxes and miniature bowls and jars that were made in such

this illustration, I also included a somewhat similar hunting scene I had photographed in Amphoe Kok Samrong, Lopburi Province, in central Thailand, showing a group of Thai hunters returning from the jungle with pieces of a barking deer's carcass suspended from poles over their shoulders.

large quantities by the Annamese potters, so much so that they seemingly must have flooded the ceramic markets of Indonesia, the Philippines, and even Siam. The lower picture in Plate 5 is an Annamese ware dish, 26 cms. in diameter and $6\frac{1}{2}$ cms. in height that was found on Limbok Island, Indonesia, and is now in the Djakarta Museum. It looks exactly like a piece of Sukhōthai ware with its central stylized floral medallion encircled by plain bands, and its simple but very arresting rim decoration.

Attention is finally called to the "celadon" plate pictured in Plate No. 14, which shows six spur marks left from the six legs of a disc-type stand, further evidence of the possible relationship between the work of the Annamese potters and those of the Thai at the Sukhōthai kilns in north-central Siam.

I would now like to digress by way of an epilogue to this article and describe briefly some of the consequences of the Mongol conquest of China in the 13th century, and the possible bearing of these developments on the history of Annamese ceramics.

With the final fall of Lin-an (Hang-chou) to the Mongol forces in February, 1276, what remained of the Sung army fled to the south, first to Fukien Province, and eventually to Kwangtung Province. In March, 1277, however, Foochow, the Sung stronghold near Canton, was taken by the Mongols, and the Imperial family, then headed by the boy Chao Cheng, as the Emperor Tuan-tsung, moved the Court to Mei-wei near the present-day Kowloon Peninsula in what is now a part of modern Hong Kong. In November, 1277, however, under mounting Mongol pressure, the Sung forces with the Sung Court were compelled to retreat still further southwest along the coast of Kwangtung, presumably with the intention of ultimately taking refuge in the neutral states of Annam and Champā, since both those countries had traditionally maintained friendly relations with the Sung Court.

There then began a sizeable exodus of Sung officials, their families and their followers to these two remote southern countries. A number

of prominent Sung officials under the leadership of a former Sung State Minister, Ch'en I-chung, accompanied no doubt by their families, followers and *protégés*, migrated to and settled in Annam and Champā. Once in the latter country, Ch'en I-chung decided to remain permanently there, if possible, although some accounts contend that he later fled to Cambodia, Java, Siam or even to Japan. According to the *Sung-shih* (the official history of the Sung Dynasty), however, when the Mongol forces finally subdued Champā in 1282, Ch'en had already fled to the Thai Kingdom of Sukhōthai, where he reportedly died sometime later.

Another prominent Sung official, Chang Shih-chih, also decided to take refuge in Annam and was accompanied to that country by many of his Chinese followers and *protégés*, including some artists and other craftsman who had enjoyed Chang's patronage. Following a disastrous defeat by the Mongol forces, the infant Sung Emperor died, and Chang Shih-chih then sought refuge in Annam.

In 1281 a Mongol embassy visiting Annam brought back to China a book Ch'en I-chung had written while in exile on the twilight of the Sung, a work known as the *Erh-wang pen-mo*. According to the *Yüan shih* (history of the Yüan Dynasty), when the Mongol forces finally subdued Annam, they captured over 300 prominent Sung exiles then living there. It was also noted that in 1273 a large company of these Sung exiles had arrived at Lacat-ngüyen Bay in a fleet of thirty ships, bringing with them various Chinese trade goods, chiefly textiles and popular Chinese medicines. Some of these Sung officials in Annam and Champā also most likely followed the time-honored custom of serving as the patrons and sponsors of various Chinese artisans, artists, and skilled craftsmen who undoubtedly elected, for very practical reasons, to follow their sponsors and patrons into exile.

It is very likely, therefore, that some of the Chinese ceramic influences so evident in the Annamese wares may well have come from such a source. I would further hazard the view that some of those Chinese ceramic influences so evident in the work of the Thai potters

of Sukhōthai and Sawankhalōk may also have reached Sukhōthai by way of Annam and Champā, rather than through the Sukhōthai Kingdom's rather infrequent and tenuous "diplomatic" relations with China, first initiated by Sukhōthai's celebrated King Rāma Gamhaeng, around the end of the 13th century.¹²

St. Petersburg Beach, Florida

January, 1976.

12) The foregoing account of Sung exiles in Indo-China has been drawn largely from that scholarly survey and analysis of them and their activities by Hok-lam Chan in his pioneer work, based on Chinese and Vietnamese sources on this subject, "Chinese Refugees in Annam and Champā at the End of the Sung Dynasty," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. VII, No. 2, September, 1956, pp. 1-10.



Plate No. 1.

An unusual Annamese painted ware jar depicting a hunting scene with two South-East Asian appearing figures carrying pieces of venison suspended from their shoulders on a pole. Around the base is an elongated representation of lotus petal panels. (From the Collection of Mr. Lek Viriyaphand of Bangkok. Photographed by the author in 1956. This picture also appears in the author's "Siam and the Pottery Trade of Asia," *JSS*, Vol. XLIV, Part 2 of August, 1956, where it was, however, identified mistakenly as a jar of Chinese provenance.



Plate No. 2.

Base of Annamese Painted Ware Plate showing the chocolate coloured slip covering the base, and the border decoration of lotus panels. Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché.



Plate No. 3.

Annamese Plate with floral decoration and chocolate coloured base. Diameter : Approximately 34 cm. (From the Collection of Mr. Dean Frascché). Photographed by the Author in 1954.

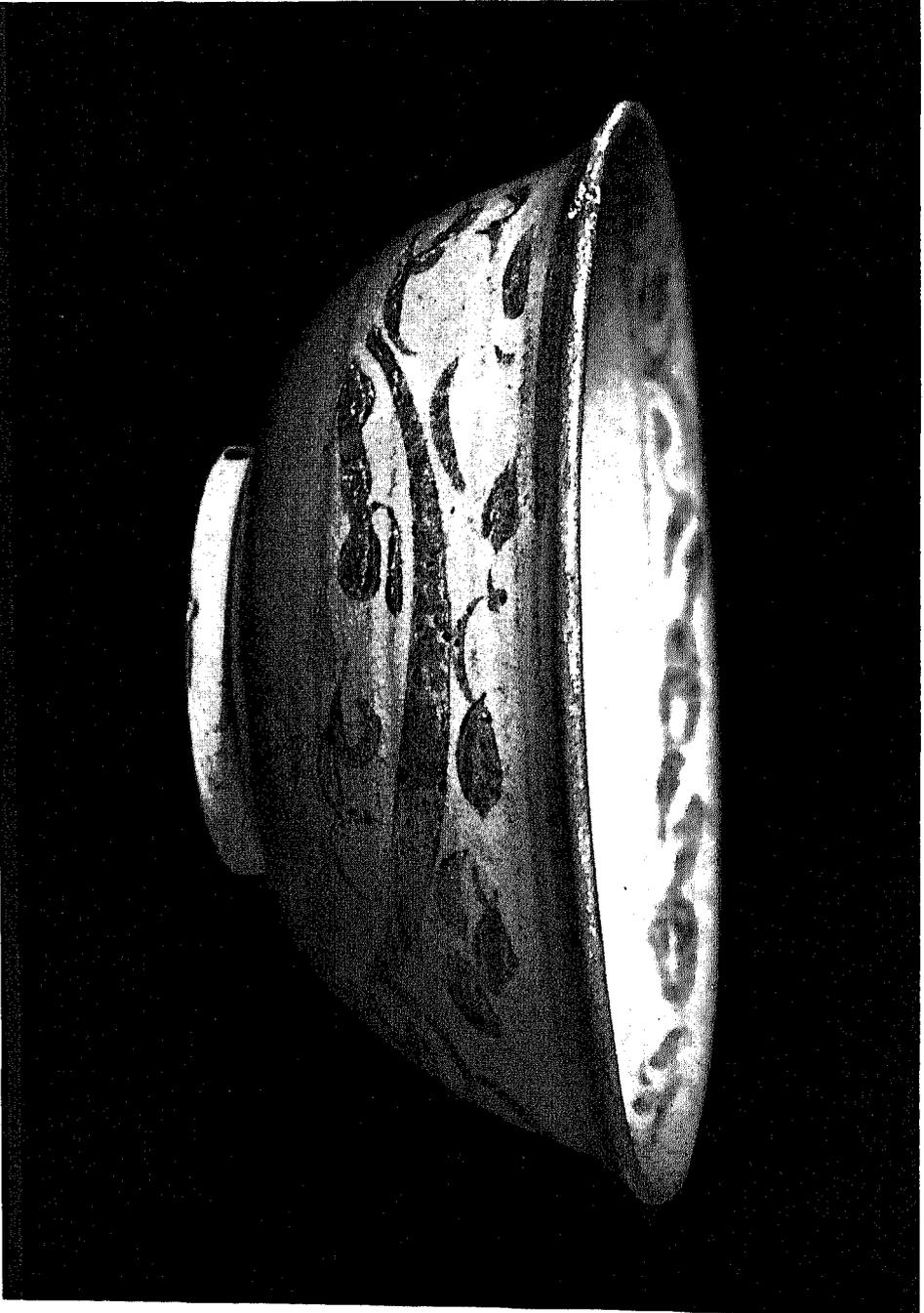


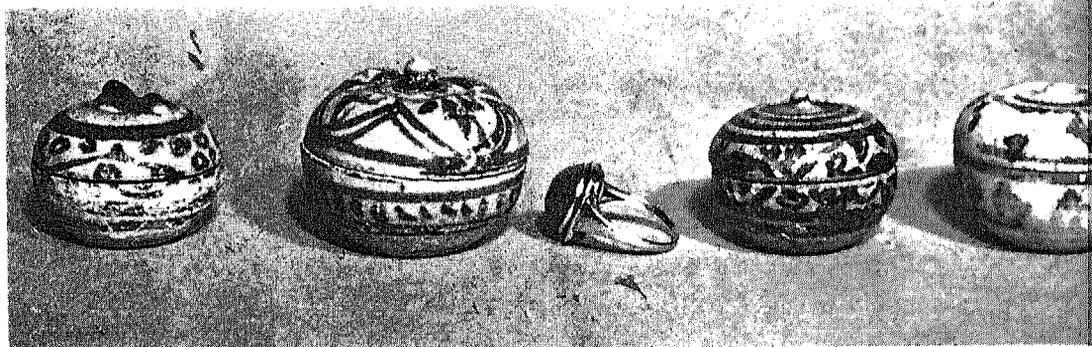
Plate No. 4.

Annamese bowl in imitation of Sukhothai ware (Collection of Mr. Edward Masters; found in Indonesia).



Plate No. 5.

Annamese Painted Ware Bowl. Underglaze blue-black pigment. (Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché).



Miniature Sawankhalōk Covered Bowls showing influence of the small Annamese pieces.
(Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché).



Plate No. 5.
Annamese Plate made in Immitation of Sukhōthai Ware. Diameter 26 cm. Height 6½ cm.
From Limbok Island, Eastern Indonesia Djakarta Museum (no. 3375).

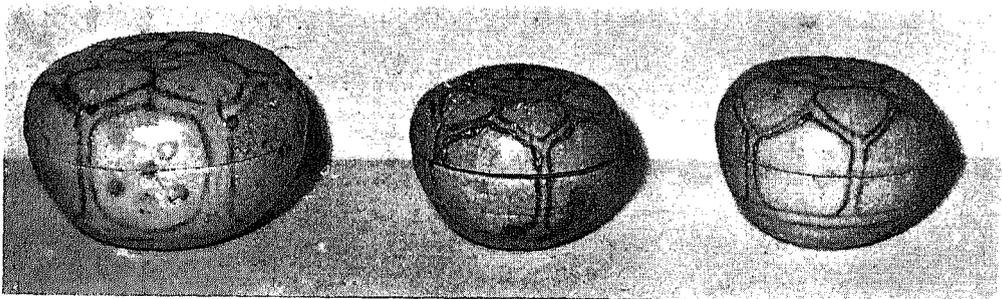


Plate No. 6.

Examples of small Annamese covered bowls with decoration in underglaze in blue-black pigment. (Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché).

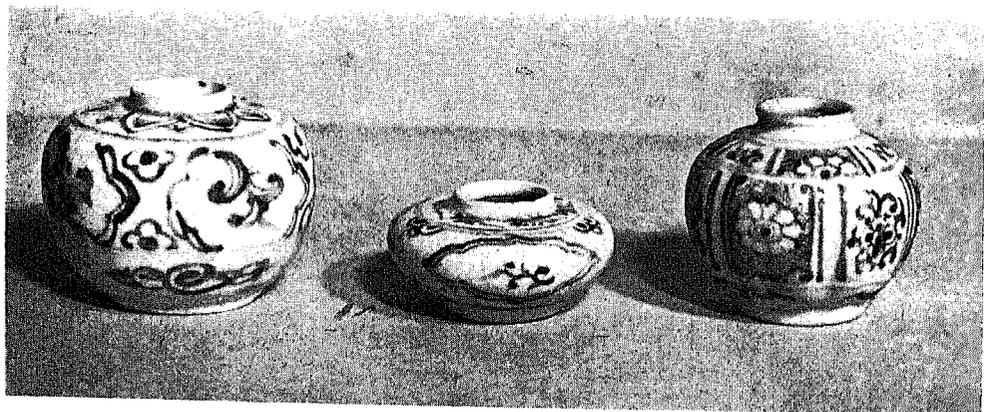


Plate No. 7.

Examples of miniature Anamese jars and bowls with underglaze decoration painted with a blue-black pigment. (Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché).

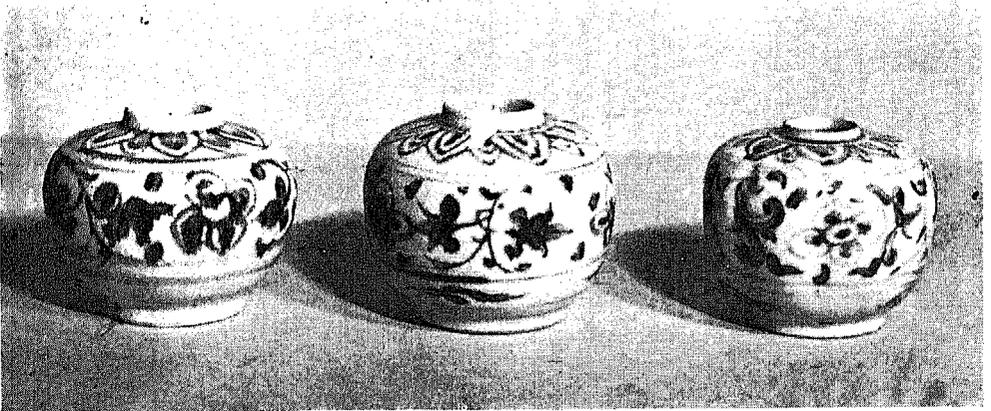
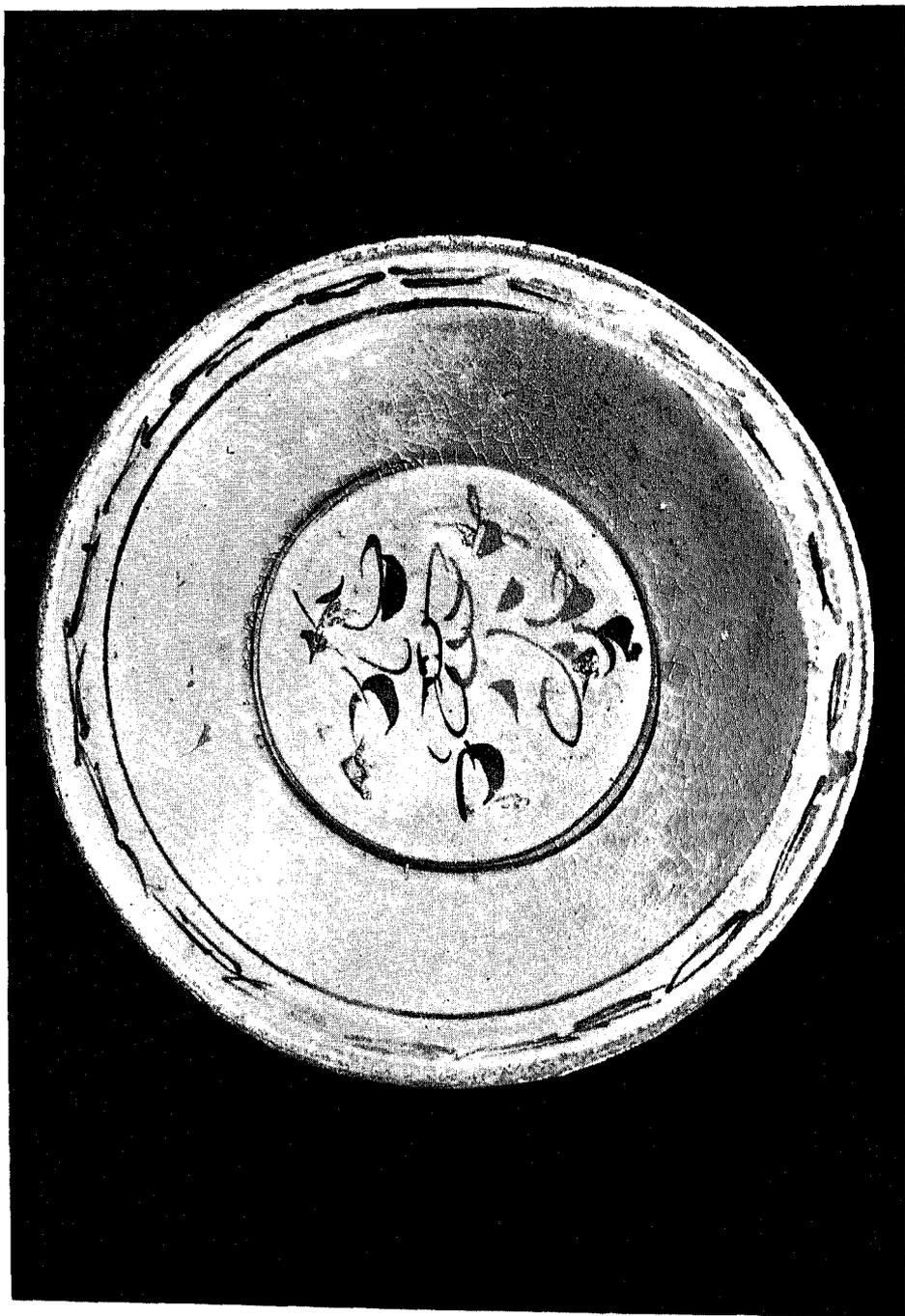


Plate No. 8.

Additional examples of small Annamese Jars/Bowls with Underglaze blue painted decoration. Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché.

Plate No. 9.



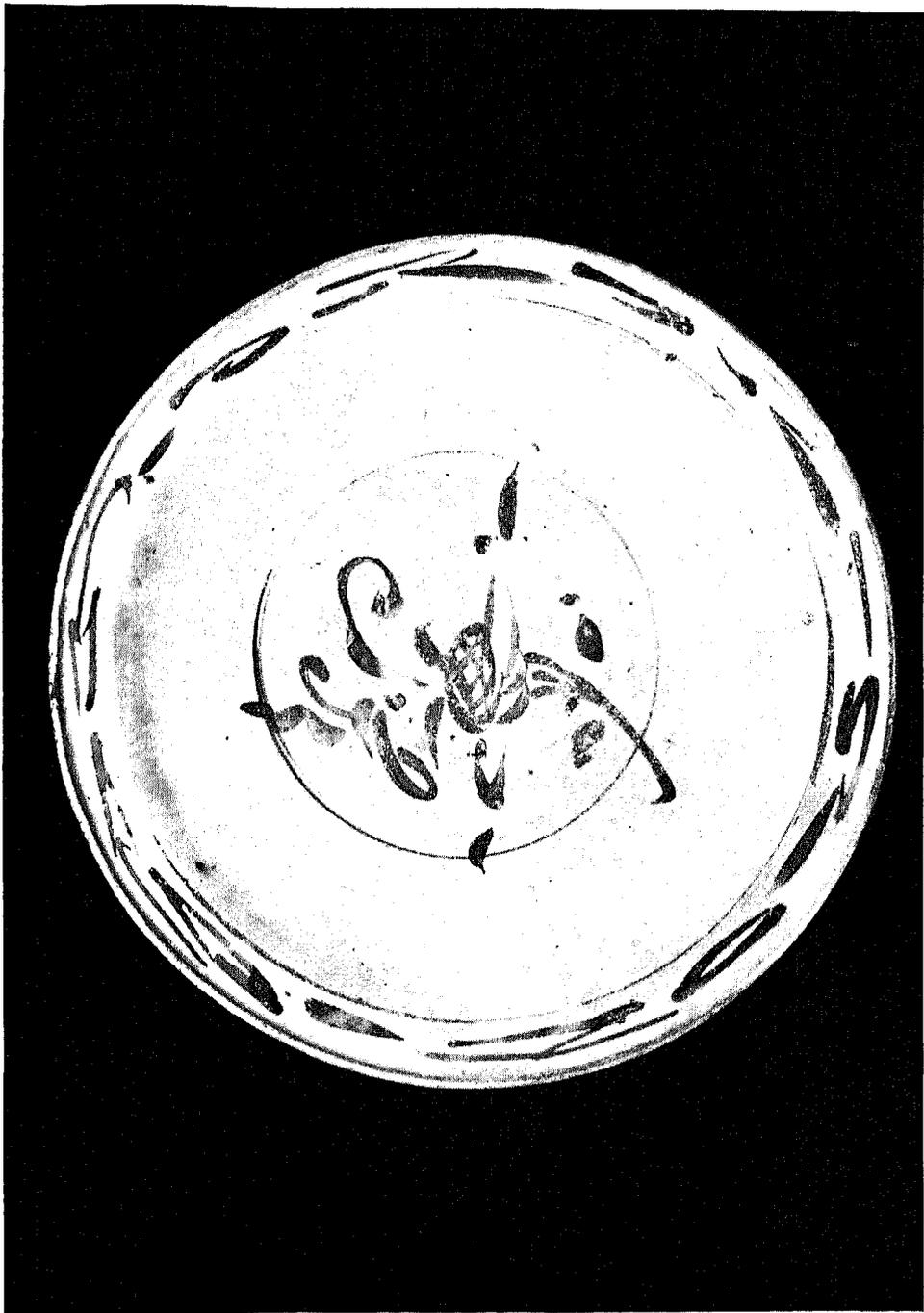


Plate No. 10.



Plate No. 11.



Plate No. 12.

Plate No. 13.





Plate No. 14.



Plate No. 14.

Miniature Annamese underglaze blue painted ware jar with ears. Collection of Mr. Dean Frasché.

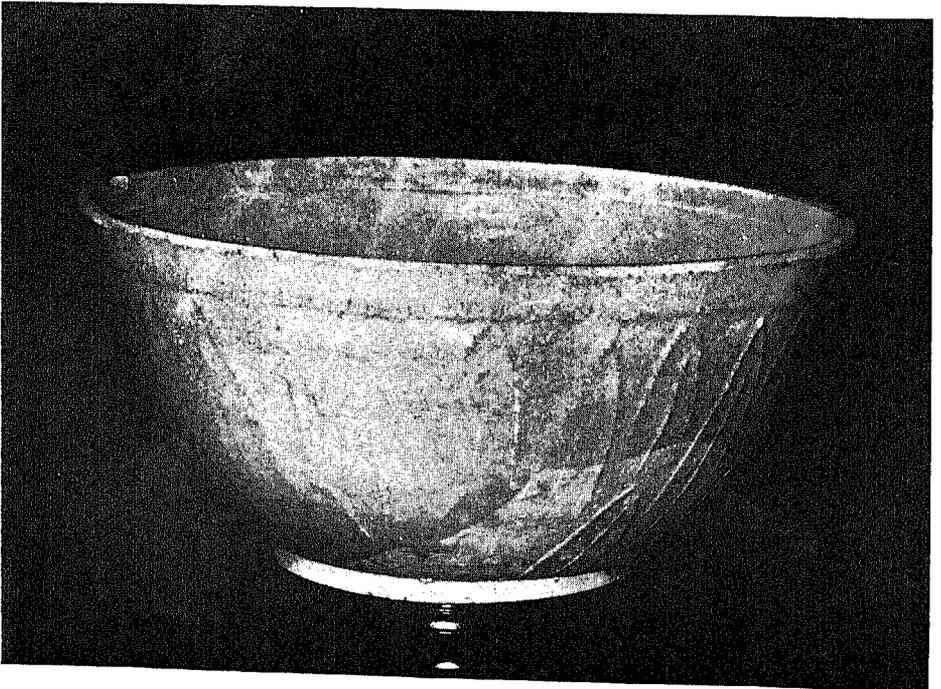


Plate No. 15.

Annamese Celadon Bowl with applique lotus petal design on sides. Djakarta Museum.