

**SAWANKHALŌK GLOBULAR JARS:  
THE FIRST SIAMESE CELADON WARE TO REACH ENGLAND,  
AND OTHER NOTABLE PIECES**

The Sawankhalōk kilns in the kingdom of Sukhōthai, in north-central Siam, produced large numbers of globular jars during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Such jars were made in a great variety of shapes and styles of decoration, usually designed with ears around a relatively narrow neck. Their main function appears to have been as containers of condiments and sauces, such as *nam plā* (liquid fish extract), sealed in the jar by a plug or stopper which would be secured with a cord attached to the ear-rings. A selection of the distinctive Siamese globular jars is illustrated in the following pages, together with comments on their common and unique characteristics.

Exported in large quantities to Indonesia and other southeast Asian countries, the Siamese jars were very heavily potted in order to stand up well during shipment over great distances. Many such pieces made their way to the European market during the nineteenth century. The first globular jar to reach England was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 1) in 1876. Others may have arrived earlier than that date, via the Netherlands, having been acquired by the Dutch in Indonesia. At that time such wares were not consciously ascribed to Siamese origins, however; probably they were regarded as some kind of Chinese ware, which indeed they closely resembled, or possibly as Indonesian or Annamese wares.

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*Figure 1.* The first piece of Siamese ceramic ware ever to appear in England is the celadon-glazed globular jar with ears illustrated here. It was acquired in 1876 by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The Museum had commissioned Major Murdoch Smith in 1875 to purchase art objects in Persia. Major Smith initially believed the jar to be some kind of Persian ware. It is a very fine piece, typical of many globular jars made at the Sawankhalōk kilns during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The ribbed design around the body of the vessel is characteristic of the genre. Above the ribbed body are four circular bands, surmounted in turn by a leaf-like or floral/petal decoration around the shoulder. The slightly flared mouth, heavily potted, is set between two substantial ear-rings.

Height 15.9 cm; diameter 17.2 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, item no. 1281-1876. Photograph by courtesy of the Museum (negative no. GX 485).



*Figure 2.* The body of the Sawankhalōk celadon-glazed jar illustrated here has a ribbed design, like the piece acquired in Persia (fig. 1) by the Victoria and Albert Museum, surmounted by four lines encircling the jar. An unusual feature is a heavy ridge atop the four circles, and above that is a curious leaf design in relief. The mouth of the jar is somewhat wider than found on most pieces of this kind. The two ears are set slightly below the heavy lip of the mouth.

Height 16 cm; diameter 15.5 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Amos D. Worthington, Jr., Vienna, Virginia, U.S.A.



*Figure 3.* Another example of the genre combining ribbed and vegetal designs is illustrated here. Between the vertically ribbed body and the two-tiered leaf pattern around the shoulder, an undulating, vine-like design has been inserted, bounded below by four lines encircling the jar and above by three lines. The two ears are set below the small mouth.

Collection of Mrs. Margaretha Ratnam, Penang.



*Figure 4.* The celadon-glazed jar pictured here has an intricately incised underglaze decoration, the panels of which are suggestive of medallions. The narrow neck curiously extends above the ears.

Height 13.5 cm. Collection of Mrs. Margaretha Ratnam, Penang.



*Figure 5.* Devoid of decoration except for a series of vertical lines around the shoulder, this very simple and squat-shaped Sawankhalōk celadon-glazed jar provides another unusual example. A rather wide mouth is set between small ears.

Height 14.5 cm. Collection of Mrs. Margaretha Ratnam, Penang.



*Figure 6.* The unusual feature of the Sawankhalōk celadon-glazed jar pictured here is that it lacks ears. The lower half of the body has the typically grooved or ribbed design, surmounted by three encircling lines. The upper half of the body is covered with an intricately composed floral scroll, apparently a peony and lotus petal motif, incised under the glaze. Above, another floral component surrounds the rather squat mouth, the lip of which curiously overhangs the neck. The jar was purchased by the author in 1955 at one of the many art and curio shops in the Nakhon Kasem commercial area, or "Thieves' Market", of Bangkok and later donated to the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Height 17 cm; diameter 13 cm. Study Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.



*Figure 7.* The fine example of simple Sawankhalōk painted ware illustrated here is decorated in a dark brown, iron-based pigment, similar to the Chaliang brown glaze, against a grey ground. A sequential scroll design covers the large mid-section of the body, bounded above and below by series of lines. The floral decoration on the flat upper surface of the vessel is almost crude. The neck and the circular band around the top of the vessel are covered with the brown Chaliang-type glaze.

Height 11.5 cm; diameter 12.5 cm. Collection of Mr. Edward Masters, Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State (currently U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh).





*Figure 8.* The Sawankhalōk celadon jarlet in this illustration is typical of vessels turned out *en masse* in celadon and Chaliang brown glazes, but I have seldom seen such pieces among the Sukhōthai or Sawankhalōk painted wares. The design of this piece is simplicity itself: vertical ribs around the lower part of the vessel body, and circular lines above them. Two curiously shaped ears extend somewhat down the sides of the vessel below the stubby neck. The glaze is unusually thick. Such jugs apparently were exported in great numbers to the Philippines and Indonesia. They are similar to Japanese *sake* bottles, but were probably intended for containing condiments.

Height 13.5 cm; diameter 9 cm. Collection of Mr. Edward Masters, Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State (currently U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh).



*Figure 9.* A unique example of Sawankhalōk painted ware, the lidded jar illustrated here suggests a strong Indian influence. The lower part of the waist is encircled by the characteristic and ancient Siamese pendant design. On the upper part of the waist of the vessel is a typical Chinese floral sequence, framed between circular lines. Although not clear in the illustration, a painted design encircles the top of the lid just below the handle, which is in the form of the Indian *Śintamani* gem shape.

Height 19.5 cm. Collection of Mrs. Margaretha Ratnam, Penang.



*Figure 10.* The final illustration depicts an entirely different order of jar: a very primitively shaped, lidded vessel, covered with a dark brown Chaliang-type glaze. It appears to represent a very early Siamese experience in making covered bowls. It may be considered as a kind of Sawankhalōk ware, or an example of the so-called “Chaliang ware”. A photograph of this unique piece was published in William B. Honey’s *The Ceramic Art of China and Other Countries of the Far East* (plate no. 145), where it was classified as either Sawankhalōk or Annamese ware. An almost identical piece was illustrated by Leandro and Cecilia Locsin in their monumental *Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines* (plate no. 162, p. 277) which they had discovered in their excavations at the Puerto Galera site in the Philippines. However, their piece is a hard-fired celadon type of ware, in light grey stoneware with a bluish-green hue, and a reddish colour on the exposed parts.

Height 20.3 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.