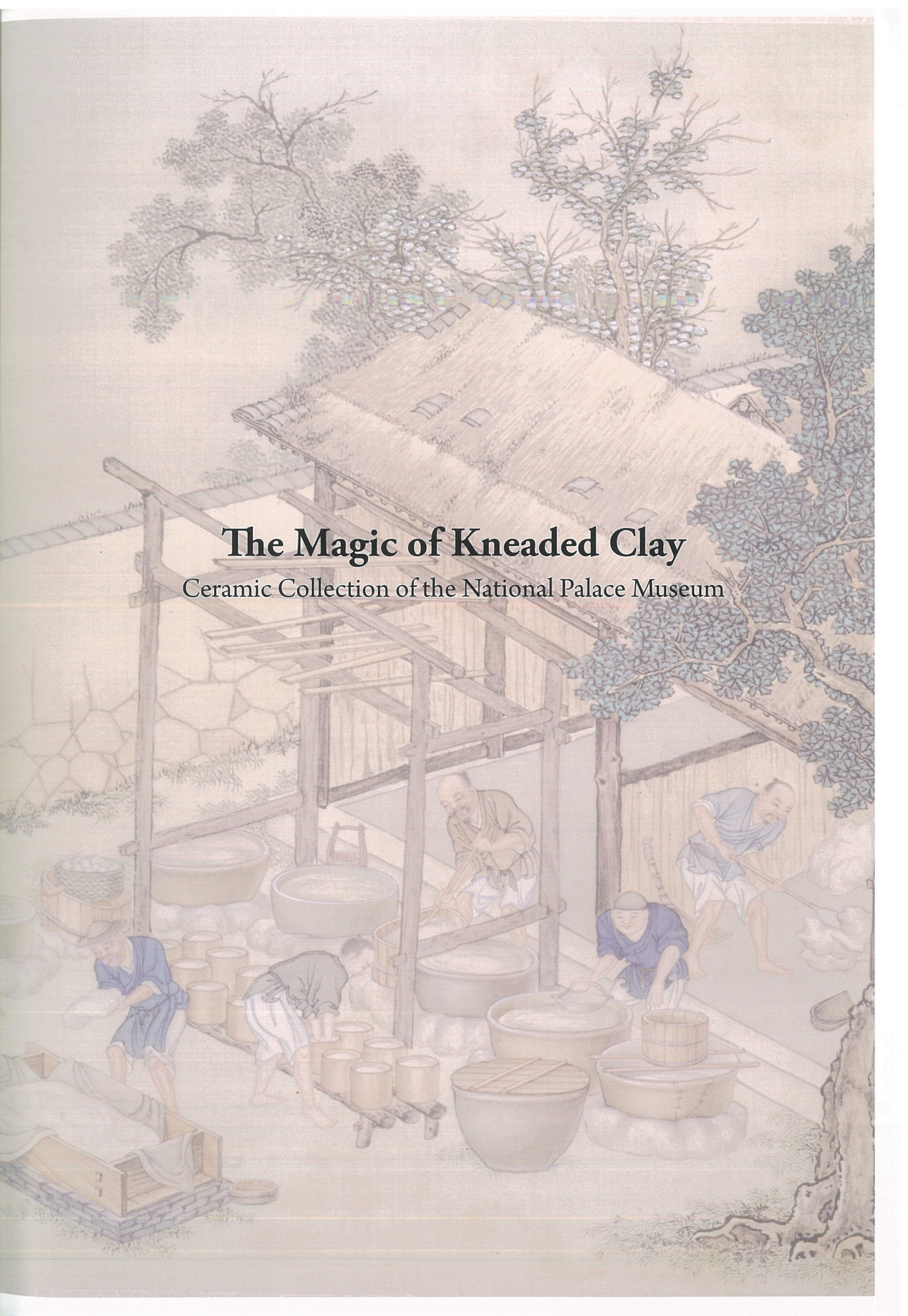




The Magic of Kneaded Clay

Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum

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The Magic of Kneaded Clay

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Contents

Introduction	007
Chapter 1	
Neolithic Age to Five Dynasties	008
Chapter 2	
Song to Yuan Periods	032
Chapter 3	
Ming Dynasty	076
Chapter 4	
Qing Dynasty	126
Further Reading	162
Lists of Plates	174
Table of Works from the Original Palace Collection Listed in the Sequence of the One Thousand Character Classic	177
Chronology	179

Bib. 600005757
Item..... 100007527
Barcode... 000010008424
Call no. NK 4565
 P453
 2014
Date 27 Nov. 61

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description of the object

reference image and description

time period

related notes

III - 19

Vase with *wuca* polychrome decoration of "One Hundred Deer" motif

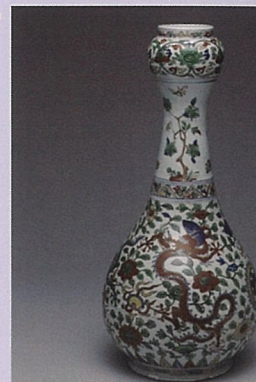
Ming dynasty, Wanli reign
1573-1620

This hundred deer vase has a slightly flared lip, a short, straight neck, and gradually sloping shoulders. The large body of the vessel slopes down inward toward the flat base. The rim is decorated with two continuous lines of underglaze-blue, while the neck is decorated with interspersed designs of floral sprays and peaches. The shoulders are painted with underglaze-blue cloud patterns, from which hang alternating brown and green pennants. A herd of eighty-nine deer in five-color (*wuca*) glaze amid boulders, foliage, trees and clouds form the predominant motif. Near the foot there is a band of decoration that appears to simulate a ground plane, vibrantly juxtaposing green and red glazes. The clay body of the vase is exposed at the base. Only the convex point at the centre of the base is glazed, featuring a regular script inscription in underglaze blue that reads: 'made during the Wanli period of the great Ming'.

During the Wanli period porcelain production increased dramatically, at great expense to the court. Further to the perpetuation of canonical styles of earlier official wares, there were ongoing developments in the vessel forms, motifs, and techniques for decoration. Five color (*wuca*) wares were archetypal of the colored designs prevalent in this period, often used to depict auspicious motifs such as immortals or other Buddhist or Daoist subject matter. The meticulous specifications of the Wanli court over the types, quantities and decorative schemas of porcelain vessels recorded in the *History of Jiangxi Province (Jiangxi Sheng Dazhi)* gives us an indication of the context and mechanisms for the dissemination and execution of the production requirements of the period. The 19th year of the Wanli period (1591) saw imperial commissions of the largest range of styles in the greatest numbers. The Five Color Hundred Deer Jars for the Eternal Preservation of Heaven and Earth (Wuca Bailu Yongbao Qiankun Tan) commissioned in that year very likely resembled this vessel.

Garlic-head vase with design of dragons, birds and flowers in *wuca* polychrome enamels

Ming dynasty, Wanli reign 1573-1620
Wei -552, Palace of All Blessing (Xianfu Gong), Guci 9303



This vessel shape derives from the bronze and earthenware garlic head vases of the Qin and Han dynasties. The name comes from the resemblance of the protruding sphere below the rim to a garlic bulb. Given the large scale and complexity of the piece, it is produced in separate sections that are subsequently joined. This vase has five visible join marks.



original palace

accession number

original number

Sul - 271, Palace of Eternal Peace (Yonghe Gong),
Guci 12030
Height 34.6 cm, rim diameter 20 cm, base
diameter 16.3 cm



Wuca (Five Color) Wares and Underglaze Blue *Wuca*

Wuca techniques use copper, iron and manganese based pigments to produce their predominant color palette of red, green, yellow, brown, purple and peacock green. These colors were used to paint designs atop a white porcelain body, before a second firing at a low temperature. The five colors referred to in *wuca*'s name do not designate a specific range of colors. Instead it is a general term that describes the profusion of colors in the design. The earliest known prototype for this technology is found in Jin dynasty (1115-1234) red and green wares, from the Cizhou kilns in Hebei. During the Ming, these pieces were produced at the Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi. There are two main forms of *wuca*. With overglaze *wuca*, the colored pigments are painted atop the unadorned clear glazed porcelain body. With underglaze blue *wuca*, the vessel is first painted with outlines in underglaze cobalt blue, and then high fired with a translucent or white glaze. Colored pigments are then painted on to complete the decoration before firing again at a lower temperature. The technique of combing cobalt blue painting under a translucent glaze with overglaze enamels began during the Xuande period of the Ming dynasty. The technology was mastered in the Chenghua period, and the production of such wares peaked during the Wanli and Jiajing periods of the late Ming.





The Magic of Kneaded Clay

“The Magic of Kneaded Clay” means a magnificent process in which raw materials are turned into perdurable vessels. However, the success of this process is conditioned by various factors. As described in a letter written by Père François Xavier d’Entrecolles(1664-1741), French missionary worked in Eighteenth century Jingdezhen, it is extremely difficult to make pottery.

“It is also rare for a furnace firing to be entirely successful, as often it is entirely lost. Sometimes when one opens the furnace one finds that the porcelain and the saggars are reduced to a single mass, as hard as a rock, because of too fierce a fire; or, some badly conditioned saggars can ruin it all; or it may not be easy to regulate the fire the way that it should be; or it may be that the nature of the weather instantly changes the nature of the fire and the quality of the subject on which it works. The quality of the wood too, affects the firing.”



Introduction

Ceramic Collection of the National Palace Museum

Ceramics is a sign of civilization. From collecting raw materials, shaping forms, applying glazes to firing products in kilns, materials go through many transformations and soft clay becomes durable ceramics. The forms, glazes and decorative patterns of ceramics are diverse and various because they were created under different cultural and social conditions. Emperors, superintendents, potters and users of ceramics all contributed to the formation of period styles. What is attractive about ceramics is that it corresponds with the course of history. The network development of kilns also reflects the phenomenon of cross-cultural interactions.

Most ceramics at the National Palace Museum came from the Qing imperial court and passed many places before moved to Taiwan. Originally from the palaces in Beijing, Rehe and Shenyang, these ceramics possess a clear registration number which could help trace the original location at which each piece was once stored or displayed. It makes the collection of the National Palace Museum unique and distinctly different from other public and private museums. Even though the National Palace Museum does not have many pre-Song dynasty ceramics, it boasts many famous wares that are unparalleled any where in the world, including renowned Song wares, *doucai* ware produced during the Chenghua reign, painted enamel porcelain of the high-Qing period as well as official wares of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

This guidebook illustrates the history of Chinese ceramics based on the collection of the National Palace Museum. From the variations of glaze colors, it is possible to see how glazes evolved gradually at different kilns and how official models developed over time. The guidebook is divided into four chapters: "From the Neolithic Age to the Five Dynasties", "Song and Yüan Dynasties", "Ming Dynasty", "Qing Dynasty". "From the Neolithic Age to the Five Dynasties" is a period of time when ceramics evolved from its primitive beginning to a sophisticated stage. "Song and Yüan Dynasties" wishes to explore the decorations and beauty of various wares from different kilns from the perspective of the aesthetics of everyday life. The theme of the "Ming Dynasty" chapter is to narrate the establishment of the Jingdezhen imperial kiln. Porcelain production became a state affair while local civilian kilns competed for market share. At the "Qing Dynasty" chapter, it shows that three emperors, Kangxi, Yongzhen, and Qianlong, personally took control of the imperial kiln. The influences of official models reached its peak. While the state declined, the style of folk art began to creep onto late Qing imperial wares.

Ceramics is a witness to human activities. Apart from allowing readers to grasp an idea of how Chinese ceramics developed, it is also hoped that the guidebook would generate interactions and feedbacks so that a historical collection could inspire new ideas.



I

Neolithic Age to Five Dynasties

In the late Neolithic Age, various regions produced an assortment of ceramics, displaying the dynamic spirit of these early peoples. For example, the Yangshao culture, located at the upper reaches of the Yellow River, produced pottery painted with geometric patterns in bright colors such as red, black, and white, while in the lower reaches, the Longshan culture featured lustrous, black pottery characterized by its thin, eggshell-like form. The Dawenkou culture also manufactured very fine and meticulous white colored pottery. Through these examples, it is clear that the knowledge for selecting materials and the techniques for shaping forms and kiln firing were advanced, allowing for the development of diverse aesthetic ideas.

Pottery also played an important role in Chinese burial customs, which involved serving the deceased as if they were still alive. Using clay, craftsmen recreated scenes from life. Figurines, in the form of musicians, servants, officials, domestic animals, and buildings reflect the social conditions of ancient civilizations and the contemporary aesthetics. The surface of the pottery was often decorated with a coat of low-fired glaze. In the Han dynasty, archaic and solemn green and brown glazes were much loved. During the Tang dynasty, yellow, green, and brown glazes were applied to a single surface, creating a colorful and free style that became known as the Tang *sancai*, literally, the tri-colored glaze of the Tang dynasty.

Glazed high-fired porcelain first appeared in the Shang dynasty. By the late Spring and Autumn period, ritual and ceremonial wares with evenly applied green glaze developed in the Zhejiang area. However, large-scale production of porcelain did not begin until the Three Kingdom period and the Jin dynasties. As porcelain became associated with refined tastes and grew in popularity among high-ranking officials, *cí*, the Chinese character for porcelain, began to appear in poetries and essays.

After the Sui and Tang dynasties, the spread of kiln firing technique allowed for porcelain to become available to both the rich and the poor. Amongst the most popular were the green wares of the Yue kilns in the South and the white wares of the Xing kilns in the North. Furthermore, Ding ware and Changsha ware were exported in large quantities, reaching as far as Egypt and Mesopotamia.



I - 1

White pottery *gui*-pitcher

Neolithic Dawenkou culture
4300-2500 B.C.E.

Donated by Mr Hsu Tso-li
Zengci 445
Height 33 cm

This white pottery *gui* pitcher is made from white clay mixed with sand. It has a trumpet shaped mouth with an upward pointed spout. The body is decorated with a band of cord pattern, and a flat, curved handle connects the body and the neck. The oval body is continuous with three hollow feet, increasing the volume of the *gui* pitcher. Pottery *gui* pitchers were used to either store or heat water, and have been discovered in the Shandong and Subei region. They are archetypal pottery vessels of Shandong's Dawenkou and Longshan cultures, dating from post-4300 to pre-2000 B.C.E. Moreover, the discovery of white pottery vessels reveals a marked improvement in the late Neolithic Dawenkou culture's grasp of ceramic production: both in the selection of clay and in the control of firing temperatures.



I - 2

**Ash-glazed double handled
guan-jar decorated with
perpendicular vertical lines**

Warring-states period

5th-3rd centuries B. C. E.

Gouci 154

Height 22.1 cm, rim diameter 17.5 cm,
maximum diameter 37.5 cm

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods the production of high fired ash-glazed vessels was particularly prevalent in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang region. This ash-glazed double handled jar decorated with perpendicular vertical lines has a porcelaneous clay body decorated with a transparent calcium-ash glaze, fired at under 1200°C. The jar has a straight rim, a slanted shoulder, and an oval drum body. The lower portion of the body is pinched inward, transitioning into a flat base. Two looped handles are positioned opposite one another on the shoulder, each containing a ring. The clay body is a yellowish-brown color, with a thin layer of greenish-yellow glaze decorating the vessel surface up to the middle of the body. The glaze shows signs of peeling. The most eye-catching element of the vessel is the design of incised parallel lines on the shoulder and upper section of the body. Works of this kind have been found in the Tingzhiqiao kiln site at Deqing county, Zhejiang province. Similar wares have also been excavated from elite Yue Kingdom tombs at Hongshan township, in Wuxi city, Jiangsu province.



I - 3

Grey pottery *hu*-jar with painted decoration of divine animals

Western Han dynasty
206 B.C.E -9 C.E.

Gouci 176

Height 46 cm, rim diameter 19.3 cm, foot diameter 19.5 cm

Grey pottery vessels with painted decoration date back to the Warring States period, yet it was during the Qin and Han dynasties that such wares first truly flourished. This pottery *hu* jar has a straight rim, a long neck, an oval drum body, and a high ring foot. Two looped handles for rings are attached at opposite sides. The vessel is extensively decorated from top to bottom with nine bands of elaborate painting. The dominant motif at the centre depicts divine beasts amidst clouds and vapours. During the Western Han dynasty the forms and decorations of painted grey pottery vessels emulated the qualities of bronze and lacquer wares, acting as substitutes for these more valuable materials. This vessel makes subtle but discernable allusions to lacquer ware.

Grey pottery vessels of similar shape but with incised decoration emerged as early as the Spring and Autumn, and Warring States periods. During the Han dynasty pottery *hu* jars were used in a funerary context for the storage of foodstuffs. Through comparison with excavated materials, we know that this vessel would originally have been covered by a lid. A vessel of this type was excavated at the Shaogou Han dynasty tombs in Luoyang, which at the time of excavation contained millet and other grains that had been preserved dry and intact.



I - 4

Painted Pottery Pigs

Western Han dynasty
206B.C.E.-9C.E.

Donated by Mr. Tsao Hsin-Cheng
Zhengci 551& 552
Height 43.5cm, width 24.5cm
Height 46cm, width 22cm

These two painted grey pottery pigs were moulded and then sculpted into shape. The realistic figures rendered by refined sculpting skills include one boar with lean body and one sow with plump physical structure. This pair represents the highest quality of craftsmanship among the pottery animals produced in Han dynasty.

Prior to the mid Western Han dynasty, the upper class often buried various daily use objects such as bronze and lacquer wares in the tomb as mortuary objects. As the social and funeral customs shifted after the mid Western Han dynasty, pottery vessels and funerary objects were more widely adopted. Miniatures of buildings and water wells, animal figures including pigs, dogs, and chickens were specifically made for mortuary rituals. These refined pottery funerary objects not only reflect the degree of craftsmanship of that period, but also offers insights into the daily life of the Han dynasty.







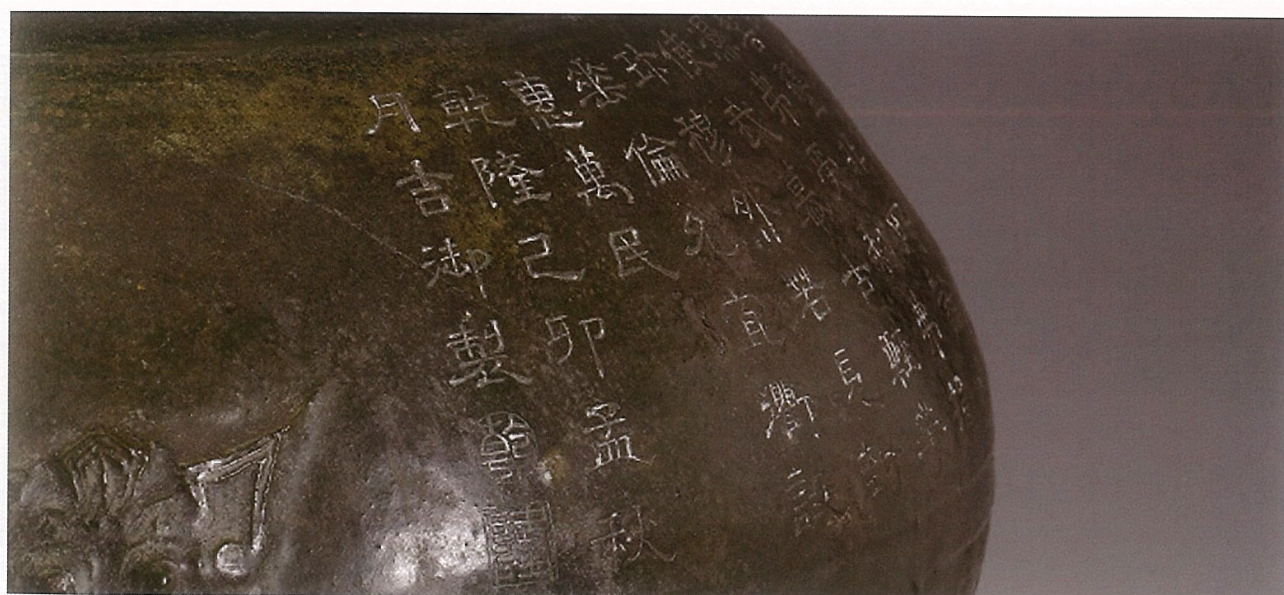
I - 5

Green glazed pottery jar

Eastern Han dynasty
25-220 C.E.

Lü 1871 / Hall of Mental Cultivation
(Yangxin Dian), Guci 2638
Height 38.7 cm, rim diameter 27 cm,
base diameter 23.5 cm

This pottery jar was made as a copy of a bronze vessel. It has a flat, coiled rim, an inverted neck, an oval drum body, and a false ring foot. The entire vessel is decorated with a low-fired green lead glaze. The layers of glaze are uneven, and sections have peeled off. As water has permeated between layers of the glaze in places, sections of the glaze surface are suffused with multi-coloured and silver dots. Bowstring patterns have been used to decorate the edge of the coiled rim, the point where the neck joins the shoulder, and the apex of the body's curve. Two looped handles for rings are attached to opposite sides of the body. The vessel shape, glaze and minutiae of decoration are all in an Eastern Han dynasty style. The majority archaeological examples of vessels of this type have been excavated from tombs. The exterior wall of this vessel's body has been inscribed with an imperial verse by the Qianlong emperor. The inscription reveals that this ware was excavated no later than the 24th year of Qianlong's reign (1759), and that it was transmitted into the Qing palace where it became part of the collection in the imperial apartments.



Black pottery jar in the shape of a cocoon, Western Han dynasty, 206 B.C.E.-9 C.E.

Lü 1856 / Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxin Dian), Guza 1175



Celadon bowl in an oyster shell, Southern Song dynasty, 1127-1278

Tian 1340, Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqing Gong), Guci 18151



The Qianlong emperor's collection of excavated ceramics included a Western Han black pottery jar in the shape of a cocoon, and a Song celadon bowl extracted from the seabed. Of particular note is the Qianlong period brocade wrapper with a floral pattern on a red background used to contain this celadon bowl; the bowl's exterior still adhered to the shell. The bag reveals the process of this object's incorporation into the collections of the imperial apartments in even greater detail.

I - 6

Celadon funerary urn with sprigged reliefs

Western Jin dynasty
265-316 C.E.

Gouci 121
Height 47.8 cm,
base diameter 16 cm

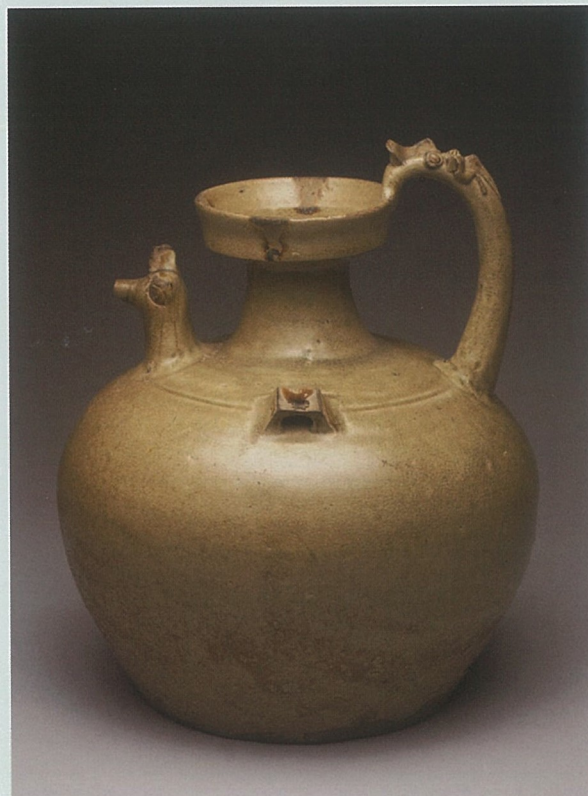
This funerary urn with sprigged reliefs is made of dense, fine clay, with a yellowish green glaze. This type of jar is often referred to as a figured jar, or as a funerary grain jar. The vessel body can be examined in two parts, the upper and the lower. The lower half of the urn has a full shoulder, while the body tapers inward. The body is decorated with various kinds of aquatic creature. The upper half is formed of a sprigged relief representation of a terraced pavilion with a tower, and flying birds.

Sprigged relief funerary urns were used to accompany the dead in burials in the south, both in the Wu state of the Three Kingdoms period, and during the Western Jin dynasty. Examples of this kind of object have been excavated from the memorial tomb of the third year of Wu Yong'an (260) at Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, and from Western Jin burials in the same area. Their production is modelled on Eastern Han five-linked jars, with an expansion of the relative size of the main urn. In these Han urns the main urn had four smaller urns attached at the rim, each of which was decorated at its top with sprigged reliefs. In terms of their production, decoration, firing, and the techniques used in their manufacture, celadon wares of the Six Dynasties period reached an unprecedented level of achievement in the history of Chinese ceramics. Funerary grain jars, chicken-head ewers, and dishes with lotus petal designs are all exemplary forms of celadon wares from the Wu state of the Three Kingdoms, the Western and Eastern Jin, and the Southern Dynasties.





Celadon chicken-head ewer with brownish spots, Eastern Jin dynasty, 317-420 C.E.



Research shows that chicken-head ewers placed in tombs were made in a fashion similar to the painted wooden chickens ancient people used in attempts to ward off evil spirits. Consequently, these ewers may have served the same function.

Celadon and White Wares

Approximately 3500 years ago in the mid Shang dynasty, the potters of southern China were capable of producing high-fired grey glazed wares. Modern scholars often refer to these types of object as 'proto-celadons'. During the Eastern Han dynasty kiln temperatures of over 1300 degrees were used to fire denser clays with a more firmly adhered glaze. These ceramics and their demonstrably thicker green glaze represent the emergence of mature celadon wares. However, there are other scholars who believe that it was not until the mid third century, under the Wu state of the three Kingdoms period, that truly mature celadon wares were produced. Chinese white wares were not created through the application of a white glaze to an earthenware surface. Instead, they were produced by washing as much of the traces of iron from the clay as possible to produce a pure white clay. Thereafter, a layer of transparent glaze was applied to the surface and fired. The lead glazed wares excavated from the tomb of Fan Cui, dating to the sixth year of the Wuping period of the Northern Qi (575), reveal the intent to produce such white wares. The Sui dynasty's capacity to produce white wares of pure white clay with lustrous glazes is exemplified by excavated finds, such as those from the tomb of Zhang Sheng (595), Li Jingxun (608) and Ji Wei.