

A NOTE ON CELADON WARE OF SUKHOETHAI

by

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According to C.N. Spinks (*The Ceramic Wares of Siam*, The Siam Society, Bangkok, 1965), two Chinese ceramic influences came to Thailand in the reign of King Rama Khamhaeng of Sukhoethai. The Tz'u Chou tradition established itself at Sukhoethai while the Lung-Chuan art was practiced at Sawankhalok.

Ceramic wares made at Sukhoethai are characterized by their hard, almost porcellaneous body made from a rather coarse paste of dull grey colour. They usually have thick walls of great strength. A form of white slip was used to cover the body and simple designs were painted in dark brown or black colour over the slip. The glaze used to cover the ware is thin and yellowish-grey in colour and of almost glass-like transparency. One peculiar feature in the manufacture of Sukhoethai wares is the use of disc-type pontil with five short conical legs or spurs.

The paste used for Sawankhalok wares is somewhat granular but could also be fired almost as white as true porcelain, and leaves the exposed areas light brown and occasionally brick-red. The glazes are generally of a pale grassy or sea-green colour. They are thin and brittle and generally possess a glass-like transparency. However some pieces have thick glaze, thicker than most of the Sukhoethai wares, unctuous to the touch as are the Chinese Lung-Chuan wares. The Sawankhalok kilns produced both the brown (Chaliang) and the green celadon monochromes as well as the painted wares of the Sukhoethai style. In contrast to Sukhoethai kilns, the Sawankhalok kilns employed tubular pontils. The disc-type pontil of Sukhoethai invariably left five scars on the glazed inner surface, while the tubular pontil of Sawankhalok would leave a dark ring where the base of the vessel rested on it. These pontil scars serve to differentiate the wares of the two kilns.

To date, there is no record of celadon pieces made according to the technique employed by the Sukhoethai potters. However, quite

recently there came into my possession a small celadon plate measuring 14.5 centimetres in diameter. The paste is greyish and is covered with thin but opaque and rather dull greyish green glaze, excessively crazed. Five spur-marks are plainly visible on the surface of the plate (see illustrations). The body is thick and emits only a faint musical sound when struck. The plate has a foot-rim measuring 5 centimetres at the outside and the edges are not bevelled. There is no decoration of any kind on either side of the plate. The kind of the paste, and the colour, and feel of the glaze are very much like those of pieces now in the National Museum in Bangkok and which are labelled as celadon wares of the Chinese school of the art discovered at Surat Thani. Except for the presence of the five spur-marks, the plate under discussion could very well pass as one of those.

With this piece of evidence, it appears that the Chinese potters of the Lung-Chuan school did go and start the production of celadon wares at Sukhothai. For some unknown reason, the production of this ware at Sukhothai was very limited and the Lung-Chuan art flourished at Sawankhalok instead.

It is very tempting to think that the use of tubular pontils at Sawankhalok suggests the waning of the various Chinese influences at those kilns and the Thai potters had reverted to using the original Thai method of stacking the wares for firing to overcome the disfiguring effect of the spur marks. The Chinese arts were carried on by their Thai descendants and pupils with more and more modifications. Therefore it might not be the original Chinese potters who moved to Sawankhalok but their Thai trainees. This is also reflected by the fact, as Spinks noted, that these potters were not quite as careful in controlling the amount of air entering their kilns, and did not achieve the high standard of potting skill and the quality and colour of their glazes as did their Chinese predecessors.

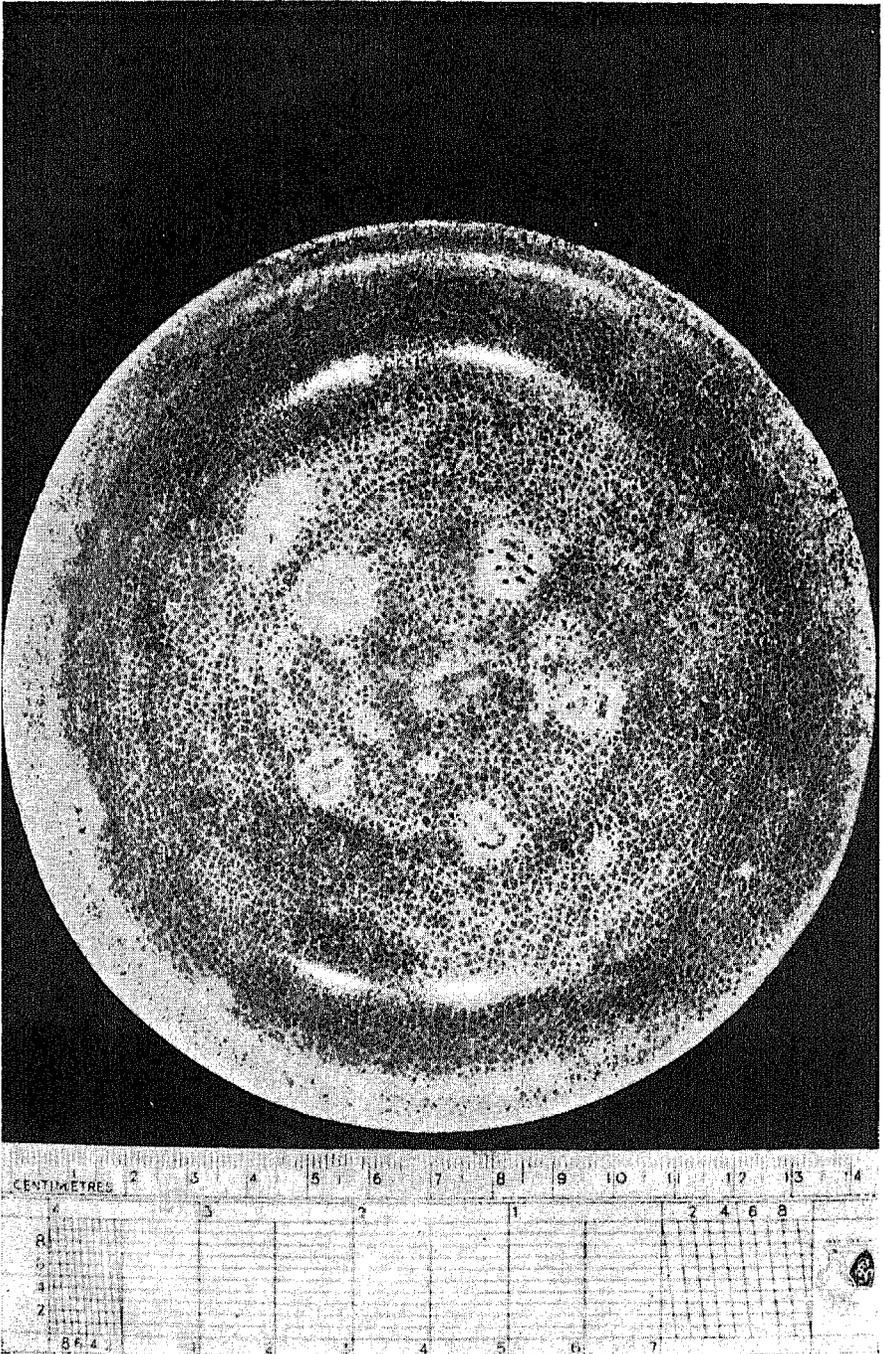


PLATE 1
Surface view of the celadon plate

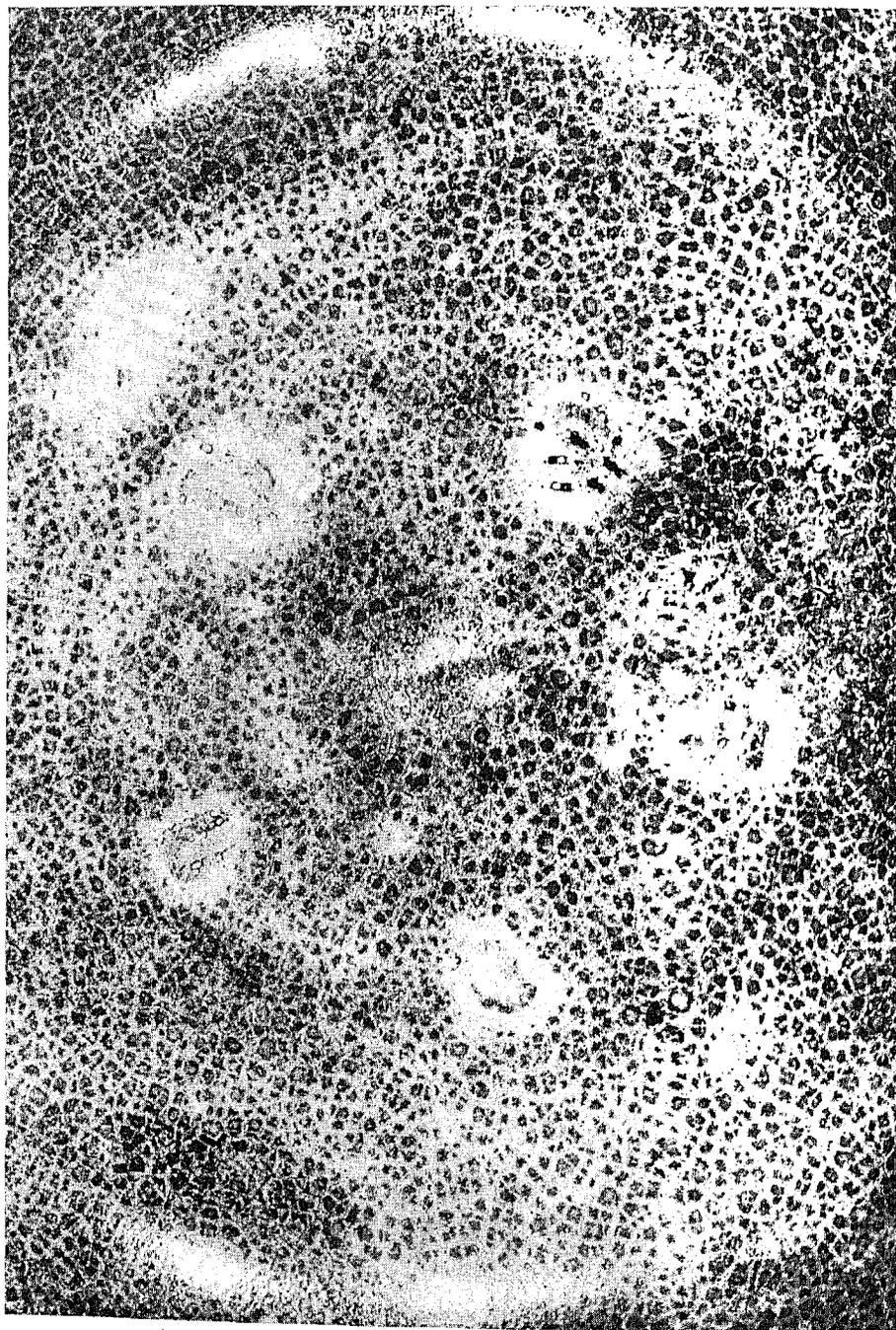


PLATE 2
Close - up view of the spur marks



PLATE 3
Foot - rim of the celadon plate

