POTTERS MARKS AND OTHER WRITING ON NORTHERN THAI OR LĀN NĀ CERAMICS

Over the years a number of ceramic pieces and sherds from the northern kilns have been found with marks, letters and writing. All these are chance finds by villagers, so that it is difficult to establish any pattern to indicate when or why the marks were used. They do, however, seem to be very infrequent even at Kālong where most of the pieces have been found.

Simple identification marks were painted onto or incised into the unglazed base of the piece or onto the pontil or support on which it stood in the kiln. Sometimes the mark is a letter or a name. These marks may indicate that in some kilns – most marked pieces have been found at Pā Yum and Pā Dong in the Kālong Complex – and on some occasions, outside potters put their wares into the kiln so that identification of the owner was necessary. The pigment used is iron oxide, identical to that used for the underglaze black decoration.

A few pieces have phrases written on the base or on the outer wall under the glaze. Three seals have also been found at Kālong. La Loubère, writing in 1688, has this to say about seals and signatures: "Moreover, they sign no Writings, neither do they apply any Seal to private Writings. 'Tis only the Magistrates that have a Seal, that is properly a Seal which the King gives them as an Instrument of their Offices. Particular Persons, instead of a Signature, do put a single Cross; and tho, this kind of Signature be practised by all, yet every one knows the Cross which is under his own hand; and it is very rare, they say, that any one is of a Reputation so bad as to disown it in Justice. In a word, I shall transiently declare, that we must not search out any Mystery in that they sign with a Cross; 'Tis amongst them only a kind of Flourish which they have preferr'd before any other, probably because it is more plain." (La Loubère; Kingdom of Siam. London 1693, p. 71)

None of this tells us a great deal although it serves to bring to life these craftsmen of old. We know some of their names, we know that they were literate, that they wrote with ease, and above all we can probably say that they were not Chinese for not one Chinese character has been recorded from the Lān Nā kilns, nor, we believe, from the kilns in the Sukhōthai kingdom where marks and writing are also sometimes found – some of these are here included for purposes of comparison.
The haphazard nature of these marks reinforces the general impression that the kilns of Lân Nâ were in the nature of free enterprises. The kilns are not organised and planned but widely scattered; the designs are enormously varied and some of the creatures are depicted with a great sense of fun; chess pieces, whistles, pulleys and simple household containers were made as well as the more sophisticated wares for wat, palace or burial purposes; experimental wares were made like the Pâ Dong celadons and the copper coloured lead glazed wares from Thung Mân both in the Kâlong complex.

Sherds, mostly from Kâlong and to a lesser extent San Kamphâng, Phân, Phayao and ‘Late Hariphunchai’ are found throughout the area of old Lân Nâ and now in the Tâk Hilltop Burial Sites, particularly to the north in the Mâ Tûn - Om Kòi area. This seems to indicate extensive free trade or bartering of goods during 14th - 16th centuries, which may indicate that society was not so rigidly controlled as is sometimes thought.

From a purely formal point of view, the inscriptions can be divided into three categories: (1) Short phrases or at least one complete word; (2) single letters; (3) simple marks like a cross or a circle. From a more technical point of view, the inscriptions can be divided into two categories: (1) inscriptions that are incised; (2) inscriptions that are painted.

With the exception of a few inscriptions that could not be read, such as those on pieces A4 and F8, all inscriptions are in Thai language and in Thai letters, either of the Fak Khâm variety, or else of that classical Thai script for which the misleading name “Sukhothai script” is used. On the present pieces of pottery, it seems impossible to draw an exact line between the use of these two kinds of letters, firstly because they are similar anyhow, and secondly because they occur mixed together. With present knowledge, and in the absence of dates, it has likewise not been possible to date the writings, and that mainly for two reasons: (1) Letters hastily written with awkward writing material such as a piece of wood dipped in paint, look quite different from the regular writings of the past; (2) the alphabets used in the inscriptions were used for centuries with only little variation. Still, it seems that the writings may not be older than about 1400 A.D., and not younger than about 1850 A.D. One item has a secure date, though, corresponding to 1473 A.D. The inscriptions on pieces A4 and F8 mentioned above, appear to be in Thai script too, but they were either hastily written or belong to a Thai script alien to Lân Nâ.
In presenting the inscriptions, the following method is used. The first line shows the name under which the inscription is listed in the Archive of Lān Nā Inscriptions (Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University), for instance: 1.6.4.1 ทั้งปุระ (11). Then follow the transliteration of the inscription/วัย/ with its modern writing ฝ่าย and the translation into English, “bowl”. The number of dots indicates roughly the number of letters that have not been read or are missing; three dots indicate an indefinite number of unreadable or missing letters.

**Phra Phim**

Inscriptions and marks are also found on low fired bricks and amulets, but have not been included in this survey.

_J.C. Shaw and Hans Penth_
A. Writing on the wall – Kâlong (iron oxide)

1. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration and writing, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (14) /...แทนหน่อนฟ.../

2. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration and writing, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (3) /วย/ = หัวปั๊ว “(The) bowl (of?)”

3. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration and writing, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (13) /.../

4. Sherd of large container, uneven olive celadon galze, writing in iron oxide on body. Probably, but not certainly, Kâlong Group IV
   1.4.4.1 กะหลัง Tentative /ทยน.../ = ทยน... “Vessel from village...”

B. Writing on the base – Kâlong (iron oxide)

1. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (2) /นายมันหน่อน.../ = หัวปั่นหน่อน... “Bowl from/of the village Nông ...” (The first word /วย/ “bowl” seems to have received some additional strokes making it look like modern ตัว(ย)ง “sample”).

2. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (1) /ภคพันแผล/ = ภคพันแผล “This is the bowl of (Mr.) Phan” (or: “This is the bowl of the phan” (phan “1000” was a rank of government officials).

3. Sherd of bowl, monochrome, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (11) /วย/ = อย “Bowl”

4. Bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 กะหลัง (พ.2/2)

5. Bowl, underglaze black decoration (no photo)
   1.4.4.1 บ้านผู่ผัน (พ.1/5) Tentative /ผัน/

6. Bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group II
   1.2.4.1 วัดขุ่น The letters /ผพ/ with the mark X written beneath. Probably the abbreviation for a name. This bowl was found in the ruins of Wat Kû Khâo in Wiang Kum Kâm near Chiang Mai.

7. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั๊ว (10) Tentative /วย/ = อย “bowl” ? Or a personal name?
C. Letters on base (iron oxide)

1. Small dish, underglaze black decoration, Group II
   1.4.4.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ. 1/2) The letter /ณ/
2. Sherd of tall pot, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ.1/4) The letter /ร/
3. Small dish, underglaze black decoration, Group II
   1.4.1.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ. 1/3) The letter /พ/

D. Seals - Kālong (incised)

1. a, b Seal, cloud grey celadon glaze
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้าย (5) /*)) “(Mr.) Nak”
2. a, b Seal, unglazed
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้าย (7) /)) = “The seal of Jao Pāk Nā Rūan”. The pāk nā was a government official mainly concerned with the cultivation of rice. Rūan was the personal name of this official. Jao does not mean “royalty” here but indicates his importance. 3a, b Seal, unglazed
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้าย (6) /)) = “The seal of Jao Thamma Thāri”

E. Marks on base - Kālong (iron oxide)

1. Sherd of dish, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ. 2/4)
2. Sherd of dish, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ. 2/3)
3. Sherd of dish, underglaze black decoration (base covered with pigment), Group I
   1.4.4.1 กะหลัง (พ. 2/1)
4. Sherd, Group II
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายยุย (พ. 2/3)
5. Sherd of bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 ปานหุ้นภายน (พ. 2/1)
6. Sherd of bowl, olive celadon glaze, Group IV
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายยุย (พ. 2/4)
7. Sherd, underglaze black decoration, Group II
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 2/2)
8. Sherd, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.6.4.1 หัวปั้น (พ. 2/1)
9. Sherd of dish, underglaze black decoration, Group I
   1.4.4.1 บ้านทุ่งพาน (พ. 2/2)
10. Sherd of bowl
    1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 2/5)
11. Sherd, underglaze black decoration, Group I
    1.4.4.1 บ้านทุ่งพาน (พ. 2/5)
12. Sherd, underglaze black decoration, Group II
    1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (1)
13. Broken bowl, underglaze black decoration, Group I
    1.4.4.1 กาหลง (พ. 2/2)

**F. Marked pontils or supports - Kālong**

1. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/3)
   The letters /k/ and /
2. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/5)
   The letter /m/
3. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/6)
   The letter /w/ and /
4. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/2)
   The letter /w/ and /
5. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/1)
   The letters /m/ and /
6. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 1/4)
   Two letters written in conjunction, starting with /m/
7. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้น (พ. 1/2)
   The letter /w/?
8. a, b 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้น (4)
9. a, b 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้น (พ. 1/1)
   The letters /w/ and /
10. 1.6.4.1 หัวปั้นหยุ่น (พ. 2/9)
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11. 1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 1/7) /ท่าน/ = ท่าน "(Mr.) Than"
12. 1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 1/8) /ท่าน/ = ท่าน "(Mr.) Than"
13. 1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 1/9) /ท่าน/ = ท่าน "(Mr.) Than"
14. 1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 1/10) /ท่าน/ = ท่าน "(Mr.) Than"
15. 1.4.4.1 ภาษา (4) The letters /ป/op/ 

G. Marks and letters on base - Kālong (incised)

1. Sherd from the Wang Nūa kiln site, Group IV
   1.6.4.1 ปานน้ำแขง The letter /บ/ or /ฝ/
2. Sherd, pale celadon glaze, Group IV
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 2/6)
3. Sherd, pale celadon glaze, Group IV
   1.6.4.1 หัวป้ายหอม (พ. 2/8) The letter /ฝ/ ? Or a mark ?
4. Sherd, pale celadon glaze, Group IV
   1.6.4.1 (พ. 2/7)
5. Sherd of saggar (?)
   1.4.4.1 ปานน้ำแขง (พ. 1/1) The letter /พ/
6. Sherd
   1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 2/4)
(7 - 23: Sherds from Pā Dong kiln, Group III)
7. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/5) A letter ?
8. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/2)
   The letter /ทร/
9. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/3)
   The letter /ทร/
10. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/3)
    The letter /ทร/
11. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/1)
    The letter /ม/ or /พ/
12. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/10)
    The letter /ทร/
13. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/9)
    The letters /ทร/
14. 1.4.4.1 หัวป้ายทอง (พ. 1/8)
15. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/3)

16. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 1/7)
   The letter /พ/

17. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 1/6)
   The letter /ก? /

18. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/7)
19. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/6)
20. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/8)
21. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/5)
22. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/2)
23. 1.4.4.1 ้หน้าปะแดง (พ. 2/1)

H. From San Kamphang near Chiang Mai

1. Probably building decoration with numbers in iron oxide
   1.2.4.1 ยอมเปิดค้าง Tentative /53/ "53"

   1.2.4.1 สัมภาษณ์ 2287/1744
   Although many letters in this inscription can be read, others are doubtful and the text does not seem to make sense. There might be a date included, viz. 2287, which would be B.E. 2287, A.D. 1744. But that is only a suggestion; it could be that the “ciphers” are in fact letters. Some of the letters in this inscription look much older than 1744, but on the other hand those archaic forms could have survived in an upcountry area until quite late. On the whole, it would be possible to disregard the dubious “2287”, to take at least part of the outer circle of the inscription as a gātha that consists of individual letters, and to date the inscription a few centuries before “1744 A.D”.

I. Marks on base - Phăn (incised)

1. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 ป้านปะแดง (พ. 1/1) Several letters

2. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 ป้านปะแดง (พ. 1/2) The letter /พ/
3. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 พาน ผอมน่องยิ่ง = ตัวย่อเอีย “Little vessel” or “The vessel of Nòi”

4. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 พาน (2) The inscription has not been read.

5. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 พาน (3) The inscription has not been read.

6. Sherd of celadon bowl
   1.4.4.1 พาน (4) The inscription has not been read.

J. Others

1. Roof finial with incised date under the glaze. Earthenware with brown glaze. Photography with courtesy of National Museum Lamphun.
   1.6.4.1 วัตราวัฒน์วัดพระธาตุ 2189/1646/1003 ปีปีเตีย “(C.S.) 1003, a year Pök Set”. C.S. 1003 corresponds to A.D. 1641; however, that year was not a year Pök Set but a year Luang Sai. Assuming two errors or inaccuracies in the inscription, namely that the cipher 3 represents a hastily written 8 and that Pök Set stands for Ruai Set, the scribe would have meant “C.S. 1008, a year Ruai Set” which would correspond to A.D. 1646. In the case that the name of the year, Pök Set, was correctly indicated by the scribe, one can argue that the nearest year Pök Set was C.S. 1020 which corresponds to A.D. 1658. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the inscription means a date around 1650 A.D. This roof finial, probably a chò fâ ช้อยฟ้า, is from Wat Phra That Sadet, about 20 km north of Lampâng.

2. Building material. Earthenware with brown glaze.
   1.6.4.1 วัตราวัฒน์วัดพระธาตุ 2016/1473 ปีปีเตีย [8] / = มุขหลัง 8 “Rear porch 8”. The cipher 8 could also be a 3. This piece is in the museum of Wat Phra Thêt Lampâng Luang.

Note: Nos. 1 and 2 are not from any of the known Lân Nâ kilns, nor are they in the same tradition.

K. Sukhothai Kingdom marked ceramics

1. ‘Sukhothai’. Building material.
   2.3.4.1 สวรรคโลก 2016/1473 /[ถ]/ 835/ or /[ถ]/ 835/ “C.S. 835”. C.S. 835
comspounds to A.D. 1473. Our attention was kindly drawn to this piece by Mr. Dick van Oenen. The item was published in: The Toyama Museum of Fine Art (ed.): Thai Ceramics from the Sōsai Collection. Japan 1984, p. 65.

2. ‘Sukhōthai’. Building material. Found at Phitsanu Lōk.

3. ‘Sukhōthai’. Underglaze black plate. Found at Tāk hilltop burial site.


5. Sawankalok pontil.


7. Sherd from Sī Sachanālai kiln site.

8. Sherd from Sī Sachanālai kiln site.