10. Yaozhou Celadon Bowl with Carved Design

Diameter: 19.0 cm. (7 1/2 in.)
Height: 7.0 cm. (2 3/4 in.)
Song-Jin dynasty
12th-13th century A.D.

Acquired in Japan

The bowl is balanced on a square-cut ring foot, the walls rising to a wide double-grooved rim. The deep carving on the interior accommodates the curve of the bowl with a large lotus leaf centered in a quatrefoil frame, the lotus blossom with pointed petals above the leaf. Detached scroll segments are carved on the perimeter to enclose the décor in a circular field well below the rim. The olive-green glaze is crazed and with tiny bubbles suffused throughout. The decoration is enhanced by the depth of the carving producing contrasting shades of green and intensity of color. The smooth dark grey stoneware is visible on the unglazed foot surrounding the recessed based splashed with an iron brown wash.

The distinguishing feature of the present bowl, otherwise a standard shape for Yaozhou potters of the 12th century A.D., is the unusual quatrefoil panel where the lotus flower and leaf are housed. Comparable examples are not commonplace. They include one with an ox and moon (fig. 1), another a chrysanthemum (fig. 2), and the third a floret within the distinctive panel (fig. 3) and all, like the present, finished with bold scrollwork outside of the panel. All are carved in a brusque and strong manner and each is treated with a wash of brown slip on the recessed base. Further, the common and very effective use of “combing” to finish a design in wares of the Song period does not appear on any of the pieces here, nor on the related bowls and dishes carved with large single lotus and leaf designs but without a quatrefoil panel (fig. 4). All of these have been attributed to the Jin dynasty, in the 12th century A.D., while a fragment with similar carved lotus and leaf was found in a Jin-Yuan stratum at the Tongchuan kiln in Yaozhou in Shaanxi province.1 The quatrefoil panel in fact—derived from Tang metalware—becomes a major decorative and organizational device especially in Yuan dynasty wares, from the Cizhou products of the north to the cobalt-blue decorated porcelains of Jingdezhen. The present décor was a hint of what was to come.

The so-called “Northern Celadons” of the Yaozhou kilns were among the most successful of ceramics produced during the Song-Jin period. Foundations for this success were laid primarily by the Tang and Five dynasties potters operating the kilns at Huangpuzhen.2 It is rather interesting and even mystifying why, given the extreme decorative richness of the metalwork styles during the Tang, the lavishness of the life styles of the imperial clan and the garishness of the low-fired wares, that the high-fired tablewares the white, the black, and the celadon green—remained plain. It took perhaps the pull of nature and natural phenomena consuming the interests and imagination of the scholarly intelligentsia, to whom the emperors aligned themselves during the Song, that gave a jumpstart to the extraordinary garden of floral designs that anchors Song ceramic style and which the Yaozhou potters in Shaanxi successfully explored. The lotus, a subject that carried with it the weight of profound significance from its Buddhist sources, was given a prime position because of its
great beauty and literary associations. The strong, definitive forms of the blossoms and leaves lent themselves most perfectly to the skills of the Yaozhou potters.

1. *Shaanxi Tongchuan Yaozhouyao*, pl. XXIII:8, shard with lotus and leaf design, Jin-Yuan period.


Fig. 1: Yaozhou celadon bowl with carved decoration of an ox beneath the moon within a quatrefoil frame, outside, Song-Jin dynasty, 12th-13th century A.D., *Sekai Tōji Zenshū*, vol. 13 (Liao, Jin, Yuan), Tokyo, 1981, pl. 15.

Fig. 2: Yaozhou celadon bowl with carved decoration of multipetaled floret within a quatrefoil frame, Song-Jin dynasty, 12th-13th century A.D., Hagi Uragami Museum, after *Masterpieces of Yaozhou Ware*, Osaka, 1997, pl. 95.
Fig. 3: Yaozhou celadon bowl with carved decoration of chrysanthemum within a quatrefoil frame, Song-Jin dynasty, 12th-13th century A.D., after *Yaozhou Kiln*, Xi'an, 1992, n.p.

Fig. 4: Yaozhou celadon bowl with carved decoration of large lotus leaf and blossom, Song-Jin dynasty, 12th-13th century A.D., Tokyo National Museum, after *Masterpieces of Yaozhou Ware*, Osaka, 1997, pl. 94.