

## 11. *Yingqing* Bowl with Incised *Zhi* Dragon Design

Diameter: 19.5 cm. (7 5/8 in.)

Height: 5.1 cm. (2 in.)

Song dynasty

12th century A.D.

The thinly potted sides of the shallow bowl rise at a wide angle from the sharply cut, delicate ring foot. On the interior two sinuous *zhi* dragons with ribbon-like bodies and flattened heads were swiftly incised opposite each other. Their bodies formed by 'S'-shapes scramble on tufted legs around a central cloud vapor all beneath a thin, pale, blue-tinted glaze. The glaze covers the undecorated exterior wall, flows over the foot and onto the perimeter of the base. An unglazed circular patch in the center of the base, with rust-colored adhesions, reveal the white body.



The name *yingqing*, “shadow blue,” is a befitting term for this ware in which the delicately executed and sometimes almost fragile images are seen as shadows when the thin-walled translucent bowls are held up to the light. The *zhi* dragon motif seen here, a salamander-like creature that always seems on the verge of slithering out of view, is not as commonplace in the world of Song ceramic design as the *long* dragon with its thick scaly body, powerful talons, long snout and horns. Jan Wirgin notes that the *zhi* dragon “was frequently used during the Han dynasty and its appearance during the Sung is most likely due to the archaistic interest of the period. The term archaic dragon is also sometimes used for this animal and is quite an adequate term to distinguish it from the lung...”<sup>1</sup>

Not all *zhi* dragons are alike. Wirgin, in his study of Song ceramic design, includes some rather complex creatures within the *zhi* category that look like hybrids of *zhi* and *long*. Among comparable pieces with the sleeker, ribbonony type of *zhi* as present here is a bowl in the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 1), a bowl illustrated by Wirgin along with a drawing of the design (figs. 2-3) and a spittoon where the *zhi* occupies the wide flange surrounding the mouth of the vessel (figs. 4-5).<sup>2</sup> The unglazed base of the latter reveals the chalky white body, characteristic of the clays from the Fujian region of southern China, the location of kilns producing under inspiration from Jingdezhen, sharing with those potters both ceramic style and economic success.

1. Jan Wirgin, *Sung Ceramic Design*, Stockholm, 1980, p. 186.

2. Tang “Xing” white ware and Yue celadon spittoons of the Tang-Five dynasties period are precursors to the Song examples, which are quite rare and include a Northern Song Ding ware piece in the Palace Museum in Beijing and one, close in shape to the present, with floral décor incised on the flange, from a Northern Song tomb in Wuxi, Jiangxi, with loose floral scrolls carved on the flange (*Kaogu*, 1982:4, fig. 1:1 and pl. II:1, p. 390).



Fig. 1: *Yingqing* bowl with *zhi* dragon design, Song dynasty, 11th-12th century A.D., Tokyo National Museum, after *Illustrated Catalogues of Tokyo National Museum, Chinese Ceramics I*, Tokyo, 1988, no. 387, p. 98.

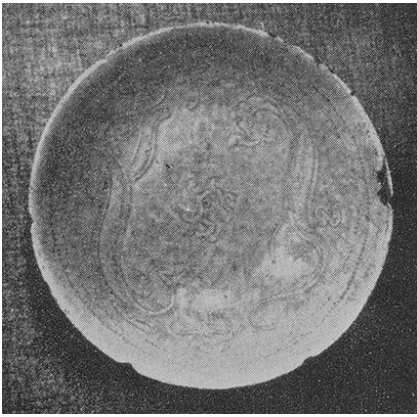


Fig. 2: *Yingqing* bowl with *zhi* dragon design, Song dynasty, 11th-12th century A.D., the Bruce collection, after Jan Wirgin, *Sung Ceramic Design*, Stockholm, 1980, pl. 12e, n.p.

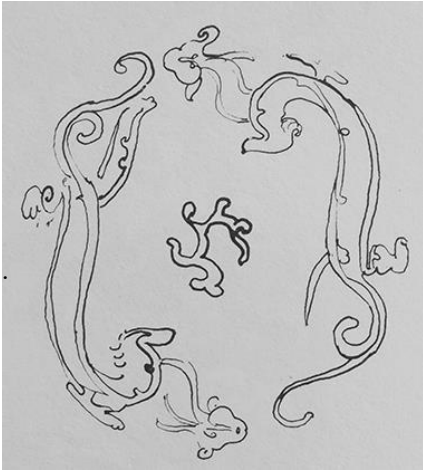


Fig. 3: Drawing of the *zhi* dragons decorating the bowl illustrated in fig. 1, after Jan Wirgin, *Sung Ceramic Design*, Stockholm, 1980, fig. 12d, n.p.



Fig. 4: *Yingqing* spittoon with incised *zhi* dragon design. Song dynasty, 11th-12th century A.D., Fujian province (?), Kaikodo.



Fig. 5: View of figure 4 from above.