

5. Yue Ware Celadon Sweetmeat Tray

Diameter: 18.0 cm. (7 1/8 in.)

Height: 3.5 cm. (1 3/8 in.)

Six Dynasties period

3rd-4th century A.D.

The sturdily constructed circular tray has a flat base enclosed by a low, slender ridge and short slightly incurved vertical sides. A central round compartment on the interior is divided by upright walls into thirds. Seven receptacles of trapezoidal shape radiate from the central compartment, formed by hand-built divider walls. The tray is covered with a crackled pale green glaze that pools in all the crevices and corners to a dark crystalline green. The pale grey stoneware has burned a pale reddish brown on the unglazed base where small patches in two concentric circles reveal where the piece was raised on pads or spurs during firing.



Circular sectioned trays were produced during the Six Dynasties period with as few as four and as many as eight compartments radiating from a central circular cell that was either left as a single section or divided into three sections as in the present tray. These trays have been found in Western and Eastern Jin contexts. A good number of published examples were provided with a prominent horizontal ledge, presumably to support a lid (fig. 1). In one tomb, a matching spoon or scoop accompanied the tray, which also was produced with a ledge, located higher on the exterior wall than in the previous example (fig. 2). Rectangular trays have come to light in which the sections are also rectangular or square, usually with one larger compartment situated along one long side and surrounded on three sides by smaller cells (fig. 3).

These simple and serviceable tablewares are described as sweetmeat or fruit trays (called *ge*) and were likely used in daily life as well as for burial. This innovative line of ceramics provided the deceased not with a replica of bronze, jade, precious metal ware or lacquer wares, nor with replicas or models of implements that were used in their lifetimes, as did the low-fired ceramic *mingqi* of the Han period. The Yue kilns provided funerary ensembles with actual utilitarian implements that had come into fashion in the post-Han era. It would appear then that advances in ceramic technology greatly influenced the character of funerary goods.

Interestingly, such independence from metal ware was relatively short lived. In a hop, skip, and jump new fashions came into vogue through the brilliant work of silver and goldsmiths and the Yue potters couldn't resist following suit, becoming, during the Tang period, their interpreters in clay.



Fig. 1: Yue celadon circular sectioned tray, six sections with circular central section, excavated from a Wu kingdom tomb in Shengxian, Zhejiang province, dated A.D. 263, after *Zhejiang ji'nianci*, Beijing, 2000, pl. 13.



Fig 2: Yue celadon circular sectioned tray, eight sections with tripartite center and ladle, Western Jin dynasty , 3rd-4th century A.D., excavated in Cixi city , Zhejiang province, after *Zhongguo taoci quanji*, Shanghai, vol. 4 (*Sanguo, Liang Jin, Nanbeichao*), Shanghai, 2000, pl. 89, p. 106.



Fig. 3: Yue celadon rectangular sectioned tray, Three Kingdoms period, 3rd century A.D., Shanghai Museum, after Li Gang, *Qingci fengyun* (“The Charm of Celadons”), Hangzhou, 2010, p. 182 (top).