Yueyao Celadon Tripod Basin

越窯青瓷三足盆

Diameter: 22.8 cm. (8 5/8 in.)
Height: 8.9 cm. (3 1/2 in.)
Western Jin dynasty
Late 3rd-early 4th century

徑22.8厘米
高8.9厘米
西晉

This sturdily potted basin, the shape based ultimately on a bronze prototype, has rounded sides with strongly everted flange-like rim and a slightly concave base and is raised on pad feet surmounted by feline masks. The rounded sides are impressed with a band of diamond shapes on a striped ground between two rows of circlets. Three mock ring handles surmounted by horned animal-mask motifs are applied asymmetrically in relation to the feet, these over a raised bowstring. On the slightly domed interior there is another impressed band of circlets within quickly carved scallops. The lipped rim is ringed with a striated volute pattern enclosed by further circlet decoration. The glaze is rather uneven in thickness, relatively bright, crazed in areas and of an olive green color. There is rough earth adhering to the concave base with unglazed patches that reveal the grey-colored stoneware body.

This type of basin, a well-known form and style of design from the early post-Han period, has been discovered from a good number of Western Jin period (265-316) tombs such as one in Wuxian, Jiangsu province, the basin discovered there now in the Suzhou City Museum (fig. 1). Numerous museums inside of China and out boast this type of early Yue artifact in their collections. An example in the Shaoxing Cultural Relics Bureau in Zhejiang province represents an early stage of the type, as the example is datable to the period of the Wu kingdom in the 3rd century (220-280) just prior to the Western Jin and yet the type is already fully formed. While the basins continued to exhibit great stylistic consistency over the next century or so, as exemplified in a basin excavated in Shaoxhing (fig. 2), there is a range in quality and some rare variation in the decorative designs Another piece, for example, excavated in Ningbo in Zhejiang province, illustrates a rare diversion from the normal decorative design, the diaper band surrounding the body being replaced by bowstrings (fig. 3). The present example is also unusual within this category, due to the distinctive impressed design of diamonds linked in a row against a striated ground.

Fig. 1: Yue ware celadon tripod basin, Western Jin dynasty, 3rd-4th century, excavated in Wuxian from a Western Jin tomb, Jiangsu province, after *Jiangsu liuchao qingci*, Beijing, 1980, pl. 71.

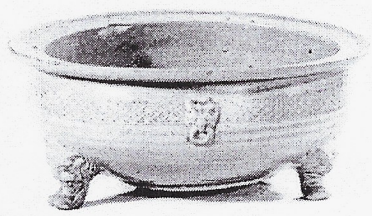

Fig. 2: Yue ware celadon tripod basin, Wu kingdom, 3rd century, excavated in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, after *Liuchao yishu*, Shanghai, 1996, p. 127 (bottom).

A sherd from one of these tripod basins, among the voluminous finds from the important early kiln site at Shangyu in Yuezhou in Zhejiang province, was included in the momentous exhibition held around 30 years ago in Tokyo and London of sherds excavated from Chinese kiln sites.[1] The potters had

Fig. 3: Yue ware celadon tripod basin, Western Jin dynasty, 3rd-4th century, excavated from a Western Jin tomb in the Ningbo area of Zhejiang, after *Kaogu*, 2008:11, pl. V:5.

successfully mimicked the style of bronze prototypes, for example, something like the gilt-bronze covered basin, but not this particular one which was buried with the deceased in a tomb in Gansu province during the Han dynasty (fig. 4). The mock handle formed as a *taotie*-mask with suspended ring (see cat. no. 39) is the tell-tale sign that bronzes did indeed provide the inspiration and prototypes for the ceramic adaptation. Lids for the ceramic vessel basins are so extremely rare that the ones that do exist appear to be anomalies.

As noted in an entry above (cat. no. 40), during the Six Dynasties period the demand for bronze articles diminished as that for ceramics rose. The establishment in the south of major centers of political, economic, military, and cultural power and significance encouraged the growth of local industries, ceramics major among them. The kilns of the northern Zhejiang province centered in Yuezhou produced the stonewares that forged the way into the future for this ceramic enterprise. However, despite the fact that a number of shapes and decora-

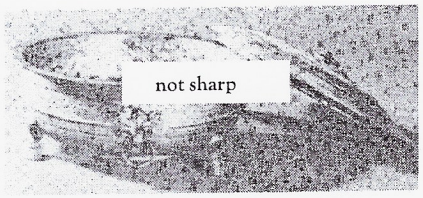

Fig. 4: Gilt-bronze tripod basin, Eastern Han dynasty, 1st-2nd century, excavated in Gansu province, after *Wenwu*, 1972:2, pl. VIII:4.

tive modes are based on sophisticated bronzes, early Yue ware strikes us as being quite unsophisticated. A natural quality, a bit of irregularity in shape, decoration and glaze, and a somewhat rough tactile quality are among the features that cause these wares to be less than perfect, but therein lies their extreme attractiveness. One counts on the sturdiness of early Yue ware and its grit. It is reliable, versatile, and at the heart of one of China's great traditions.

1. P. Hughes-Stanton and Rose Kerr, *Kiln Sites of Ancient China*, London, 1980, cat. no. 16.