



Jizhou Ware Tortoiseshell “Brushwasher”

吉州窯玳瑁釉瓷筆洗

Diameter: 11.2 cm. (4 3/8 in.)

Height: 6.5 cm. (2 5/8 in.)

Southern Song-Yuan dynasty

12th-13th century A.D.

The bowl, a product of a kiln in Jizhou, Jiangxi province, is of rounded form resting on a roughly cut foot and slightly recessed base where the pale buff-colored, somewhat coarse body, not unusual for this ware, is visible. To create the "tortoiseshell" effect the bowl was covered inside and out with a combination of an opaque dark-brown glaze with a lighter caramel-colored glaze of greater translucency, the lighter glaze pulling the darker glaze in drips down the interior walls and more randomly on the exterior.

Although we think of the Jun and Jizhou bowls and dishes as traditional dining and drinking vessels and most suitable for the collector today, they could well serve the calligrapher at his desk as noted in the previous entry (no. 30). Both wares are also notable, along with the contemporaneous Jian ware of Fujian province, for their tactile qualities—inviting one to hold them rather than simply admire from a distance, in contrast to the majority of Song dynasty wares. The intimacy they inspire would also work well in the context of a scholar's daily work.

Jizhou potters produced a great variety of wares, some decorated with designs inspired by metalware, textiles, and painting. They also looked to nature for inspiration: through a leaf plucked from nature that could be floated beneath a glaze

where its carbonized skeleton was preserved in black after firing or through a combination of colors to produce the look of a tortoiseshell, as in the present bowl. As noted in a previous *Kaikodo Journal*, various containers, hair ornaments, combs and jewelry fashioned from actual tortoiseshell had been in vogue since the Tang period and it might have been works such as these that served as the inspiration for the Jizhou potter.

While these signature tortoiseshell-glazed wares of the Jizhou kilns were perfected during the Song dynasty, the popularity of the ceramics in Japan into the post-Song period was largely responsible for their continued production into the early Yuan at least, making it difficult to assign a piece to a specific dynasty.