A Longquan Celadon Funerary Jar

龍泉窯多管青瓷瓶

Height: 33 cm. (13 in.)
Northern Song period
11th century

高 **33** 厘米
北宋

Provenance: the Carl Kempe collection

Published:

Bo Gyllensvard, *Chinese Ceramics in the Carl Kempe Collection*, Stockholm, 1964, pl. 27;
Oriental Ceramics: The World's Great Collections, vol. 8 (Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm), Tokyo, 1982, pl. 86;
Chinese Ceramics in the Carl Kempe Collection, The Museum of Art and Far Eastern Antiquities in Ulricehamn, Ulricehamn, 2002, pl. 250.

The funerary jar is a very light grey stoneware in elongated ovoid form. It ascends from a slanted food to five cushion-like tiers in descending size, pagoda style, from the foot to the cylindrical neck. Each of the four uppermost tiers is carved with overlapping lotus petals in double-line outlines. Four faceted tubular spouts are applied on the shoulder producing a somewhat organic effect. The jar is covered overall with a greyish-green glaze aside from the foot rim and base which have burned reddish-orange in the firing. A hat-shaped cover surmounted by a lotus-form knob exhibiting a slightly darker glaze color on the exterior completes the form.

It has only been in relatively recent times that such funerary jars as the present are understood to have been produced at the Longquan kilns in southern Zhejiang province.[1] Since these vessels appeared to be very closely linked to the Yueyao stylistic tradition, it had been assumed that they were products of the Yue kilns, until kiln-site excavations proved differently. A number of these urns closely related to the present form have been discovered with inscriptions on the lid interiors including one to 1070 (figs. 1-2), another to 1078 (fig. 3), and yet another to 1080 (fig. 4). The main production sites were in Zhejiang province at Jincun and at Dayao in Longquan and at Shangyang in Qingyuanxian. It is believed that these spouted urns, which according to inscriptions and actual contents discovered, were for grain to be placed in the tomb with the deceased. This particular style of spouted offering vessel went out of fashion with the rise of the classic Longquan Southern Song period paired urns with their characteristic sea-foam green glazes and ubiquitous dragon and tiger sculpted around the shoulders. One late manifestation of the spouted form produced contemporaneously with these at Longquan were shorter in stature than the earlier spouted vessels and with the fresh sea-foam green glazes typical of their times, but with the lotus-petal decor retained (fig. 5).

To call these jars "multi-spouted" is actually somewhat misleading. The so-called spouts do not usually connect with the interiors of the vessels

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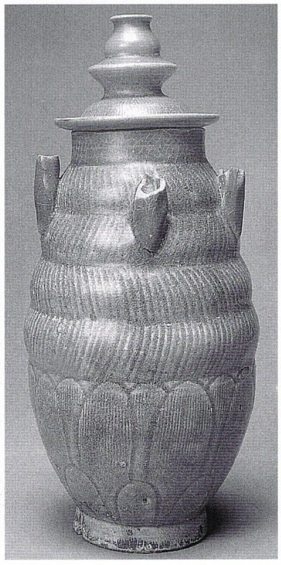

Fig. 1: Longquan celadon funerary urn, dated by inscription to 1070, after *Longquanyao qingci*, ("Celadon from Longquan Kilns"), Taipei, 1998, pl. 61-1, p. 100.

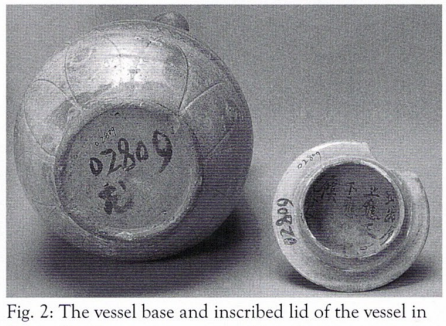

Fig. 2: The vessel base and inscribed lid of the vessel in fig. 1, after *Longquanyao qingci*, ("Celadon from Longquan Kilns"), Taipei, 1998, pl. 61-2, p. 101.

and they might be more accurately described as tubes or sockets. These tubes are sometimes round in section and sometimes faceted or polygonal, the ends or lips cut straight or serrated, and they might all be aligned around a single tier, can

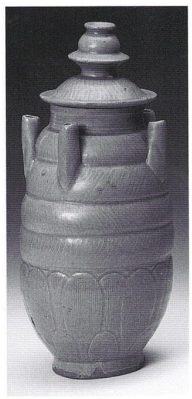

Fig. 3: Longquan celadon funerary urn, dated by inscription to 1078, after *Zhejiang ji'nian ci*, Beijing, 2000, pl. 201.

number from four to around fifteen or more and they may vary in length as in the relatively long tubes of a vessel unearthed in the city of Longquan (fig. 6). In a number of examples the tubes have morphed into strips of clay pressed against the side of the jar (fig. 7), causing us to question whether these spouts or tubes had any function at all.

Even if sometimes perplexing, it is nevertheless an engaging task to chart the change of shapes over time in the world of Chinese ceramic production. A shock of outside influence can spark innovations, can turn the wheels of potters in innovative directions, and can take us on journeys into new, wild and wonderful realms of form. Shifts in taste from buoyant to sleek or from supple to jagged profiles, for example, result in effects that might be easily appreciated

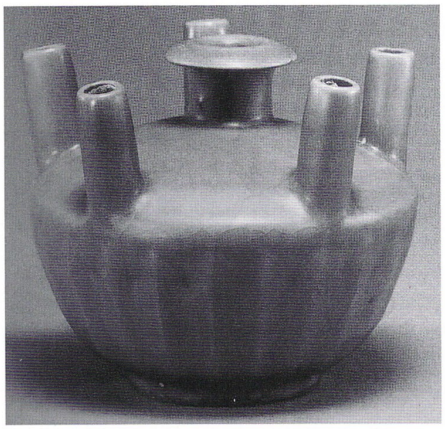

Fig. 5: Multi-spouted Longquan jar, from a Southern Song period hoard discovered in Chengdu, Sichuan province, Southern Song period, 13th century, after *Newly Discovered Southern Song Ceramics: A Thirteenth-Century "Time Capsule"*, Tokyo, 1998, pl. 20, p. 29.

but are sometimes hard to explain. A slightly altered or tweaked form may be symptomatic of its times but it is usually not easy and sometimes impossible to identify the forces that caused the shifts. Aesthetics can be harder to explain than the

Fig. 4: Longquan celadon funerary urn, dated by inscription to 1080, Yamato Bunkakan, Osaka, after Kamei Meitoku, "Chronology of Longquan Wares of the Song and Yuan Periods" in Chuimei Ho, ed., *New Light on Chinese Yue and Longquan Wares*, Hong Kong, 1994, pl. 3:F, p. 69.

weather and certainly are as unpredictable. We sometimes understand the mechanics of change in hindsight, sometimes not.

Funerary ceramics present an entire world of challenges in this regard. The idiosyncratic wares of the north dating from the Han through Tang era made expressly for burial were low-fired ceramics with painted designs or covered

Fig. 6: Longquan celadon funerary urn with 7 long spouts, excavated in Longquan city, Zhejiang province, after *Longquanyao qingci* ("Celadon from Longquan Kilns"), Taipei, 1998, pl. 41, p 82.

Fig. 7: Longquan celadon funerary urn with clay strips, after *Longquanyao qingci*, ("Celadon from Longquan Kilns"), Taipei, 1998, pl. 62, p. 102.

Fig. 8: A tall sandstone pagoda-form Buddhist pillar, Song dynasty, 11th century, formerly Kaikodo, after *Kaikodo Journal* XV, "Realms of Faith," Spring 2000, pl. 70.

Fig. 9: Detail of fig. 8.

with brightly colored lead-silicate glazes and were comprised of multitudinous shapes, sizes and types. However south of the Yangzi, a very different funerary product was made over many centuries, ceramics that we simply call "funerary urns." It was the high-fired wares of the Yue tradition that provided this different answer to funerary art and accoutrement. While their actual functions are debated, these funerary jars, sometimes made in pairs, sometimes not, are a huge, closely knit clan. Standing out in our minds as the most extraordinary among them are the *hunping* or soul jars made in the early post-Han period and the tall spindly *yingqing* urns of Jingdezhen produced during the Song-Yuan period from the 11th to 14th century.[2] And a third distinctive type is the multi-spouted jar, sometimes plain bodied, or, as in the examples we have considered here, multi-tiered, as if a series of cushions of descending size were stacked upon another and then surmounted by a lid. The visual similarity they have with Buddhist pagodas, pagoda finials, or to stone pillars such as the one illustrated here (figs. 8-9) suggests that Buddhist architectural art might be the inspiration behind the ceramic funerary vessels.

1. See the discussion in the entry for a contemporaneous Longquan ewer in *Kaikodo Journal* XXVI, "Honored Guests," Spring 2010, no. 48, pp. 108-109 and 190-191 where this problem is more fully discussed and also see Kamei Meitoku, "Chronology of Longquan Wares of the Song and Yuan Periods" in Chuimei Ho, ed., *New Light on Chinese Yue and Longquan Wares*, Hong Kong, 1994, pp. 46-84.
2. For the *yingqing* urns see *Kaikodo Journal* XXVI, "Honored Guests," Spring 2010, no. 58, pp. 128-192 and 200-202.