Cizhou Bowl with Combed & Incised Lotus Design

磁州窯刻蓮花紋瓷碗

Diameter: 22.8 cm. (9 in.)
Height: 8.3 cm. (3 1/4 in.)
Jin dynasty
12th century A.D.

徑 22.8 厘米
高 8.3 厘米
金

The large bowl has gently rounded sides rising from a thick square-cut foot to a very slightly everted rim. A lotus bloom in profile is supported on a stem, which also issues a large lotus leaf, with a water plant floating among them. The decoration was achieved by coating the bowl inside and out with a cream-colored slip, incising and combing through the white slip to the body beneath and covering the bowl with glaze, the glaze becoming clear and colorless in the firing and the grey stoneware body exposed through the incised and combed lines, making the design appear as if it had been penciled on the surface. The design is incised with a sure hand allowing it to stand out against the combed ground, and the decoration confined within an area bordered by an incised line circling the interior of the bowl below the rim. Five small unobtrusive spur marks visible on the interior are evidence that another piece was supported within the bowl during firing. The slip coating on the exterior is undecorated, the slip ending well above the unglazed foot and base where the buff-colored surface of the stoneware is exposed.

An effective yet relatively rapid way to decorate a slip-coated ceramic surface was through the use of a pointed tool to cut through the slip down to the body below to create the outlines and details of a motif and often completing the image by using a comb-like tool to swipe across the slip to create a backdrop. Large floppy lotus blossoms, with their broad, flat leaves were the perfect motifs for this method of decor. A good number of examples of this design is known from public collections, an example from the Palace Museum in Beijing shown here (figs. 1-2). This specific lotus design was produced at various Cizhou kiln centers, such as that at Hebiji in Henan (fig. 3), and the technique in general utilized at other

Fig. 1: Cizhou bowl with incised and combed lotus design, Song dynasty, Palace Museum, Beijing, after *Zhonggua taoci quanji: Song* (*shang*), Shanghai, 2000, pl. 137 (bottom).

Fig. 2: Side view of fig. 1, after *Zhonggua taoci quanji: Song* (*shang*), Shanghai, 2000, pl. 137 (top).

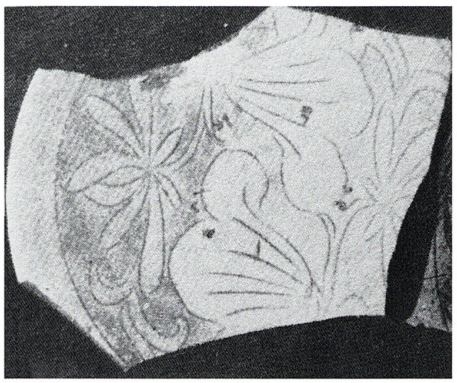

Fig. 3: Large shard from a bowl decorated with incised and combed lotus design excavated at the Hebiji kiln, Tangyinxian, Henan province, after Yutaka Mino, *Freedom of Clay and Brush through Seven Centuries in Northern China: Tz'u-chou Type Wares, 960-1600 A.D.*, Indianapolis, 1980, fig. 78, p. 91.

Cizhou kilns and prominently at Guantai in southern Hebei province, where the technique was used on a variety of shapes to create a diversity of designs.

Fig. 4: Ding ware bowl with incised lotus and waterweed, Northern Song period, 11th-early 12th century A.D., Osaka Oriental Ceramic Museum, after *White Porcelain of Ding yao*, Tokyo, 1983, pl. 117.

Similar lotus subjects, along with the frond-like vegetation meant to represent common waterweed (*elodea*), are almost exactly like those on vessels from the Ding kilns, also in Hebei province, which should not be surprising (fig. 4-5). The use of white slip on the darker stoneware bodies produced from the local clays of the Cizhou area was an attempt to replicate the appearance of the fine white Ding ware bodies, a ware that was most fashionable during the Northern Song period. Decorative designs were, naturally, also borrowed. Interestingly, a variant using combing was also created at Guantai (fig. 6). Rather than incising the design and combing the background, the actual motifs—flowers and leaves—were produced through combing, as if the designs were painted with a brush with the hairs fanned out. Although this technique appears to have been very infrequently used, it demonstrates the experimental nature and creativity of the Guantai craftsmen, who have left us with one design solution after another, some of them very elegant ones.

Fig. 5: Ding bowl with incised lotus and waterweed, Northern Song period, 11th-early 12th century A.D., Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, after Jan Wirgin, *Sung Ceramic Design*, Stockholm, 1979, pl. 60.

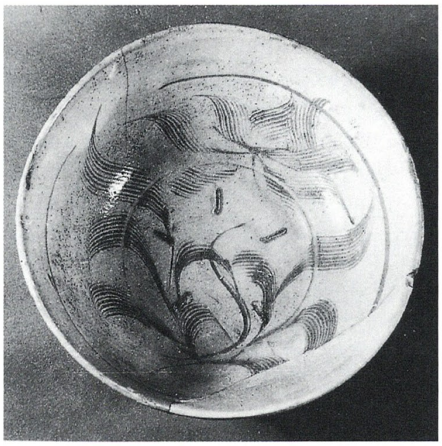

Fig. 6: Cizhou bowl with combed floral design, excavated at the Guantai kiln, Hebei province, Jin dynasty, 12th century A.D., after *Guantai Cizhou yaozhi*, Beijing, 1997, pl. XII:1.