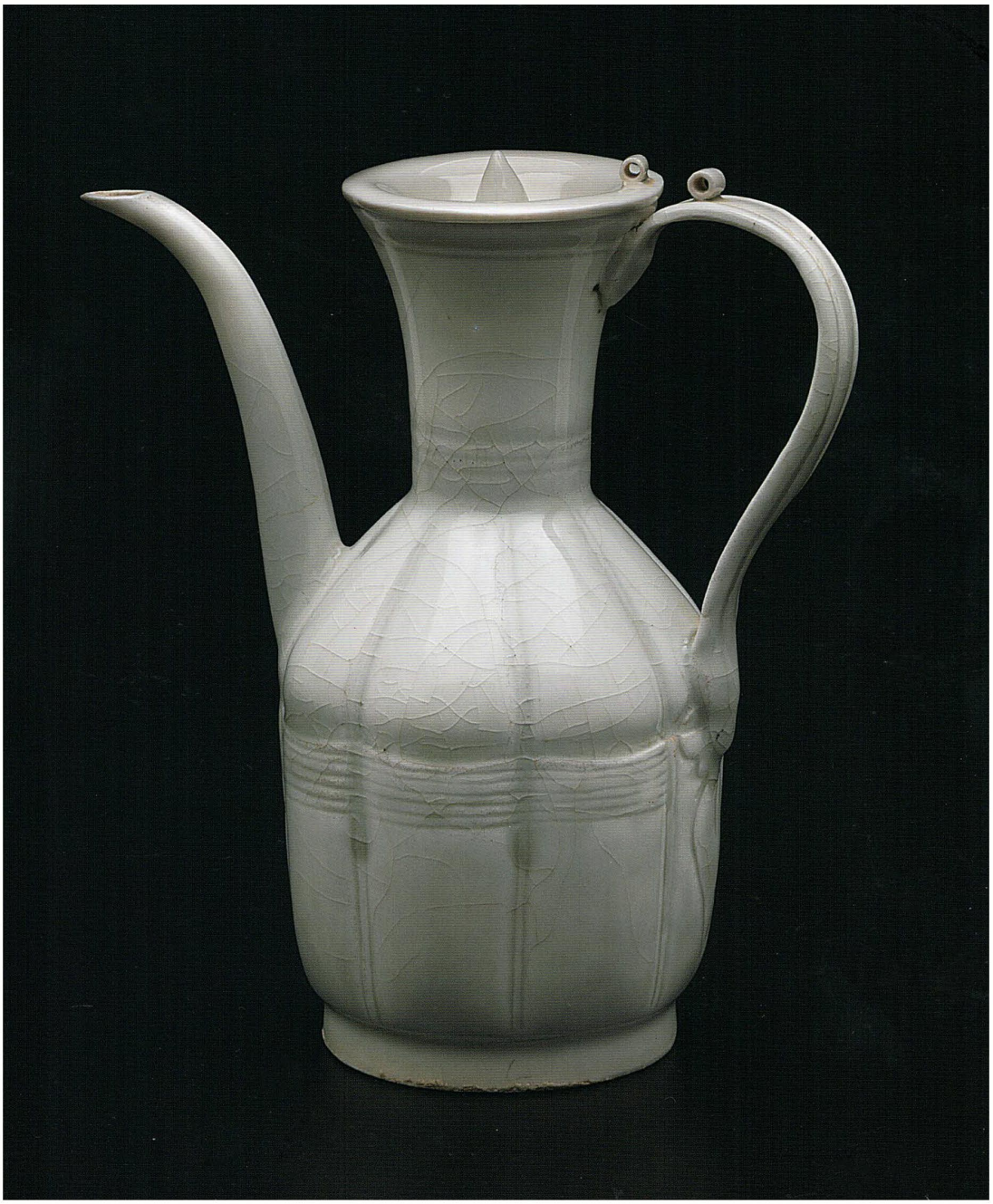

Yingqing-Glazed Porcelanous Ewer with Lid

影青釉瓷連蓋執壺

Height: 17.8 cm. (7 in.)
Song dynasty
11th-12th century

高17.8厘米
宋

The pouring vessel is very lightweight and thinly potted with an eight-lobed body decorated with a series of horizontal-line borders below the midsection. Underneath the tapered spout and strap handle a foliate leaf motif is incised to resemble a metalwork design. The dished cover contains a lotus-bud form knob centered on four leaves. A tiny cylinder is applied to the rim of the cover to match another on the handle to join the two. A thin translucent glaze of the palest blue-green color covers the ewer settling into the crevices of horizontal and vertical lines giving added dimension. The body is very hard and white and is best seen on the underside of the cover.

The ewer is refined and elegant; cool and seductive; it is light in weight and conveys a sense of great fragility. Yet, at the same time, it is totally functional and the sheer number of such vessels that survive today suggests that they are heartier than they seem and indicates further that their popularity was immense. Although one is not accustomed to seeing this type of tall, slender *yingqing* ewer combined with a warming bowl, it has been suggested that they would have been so used. The horizontal lines ringing the vessels below the points where the spout emerges (the handle is attached to the body at the same level on the opposite side) indicate where the top of the warming bowl would have necessarily been. Based on the bowls accompanying another variety of ewer, that with a shorter body and neck (fig. 1), the bowls might have been plain or lobed, and in the later case the mouth rim deeply scalloped. The vessels could thus have been used for warming wine and pouring it into serving cups; contemporaneous paintings tell us that they would have been replenished from larger vessels where the wine was stored, vessels called *meiping*. Tea enthusiasts argue that the ewers would have been used to pour hot water into bowls holding tea in powder form.[1] It is hard to imagine that these ceramic objects that we hold in such high esteem, covet and treasure today were the instruments of daily life—at least for a certain class of individual during Song times.

Such ewers have been found at kiln sites in

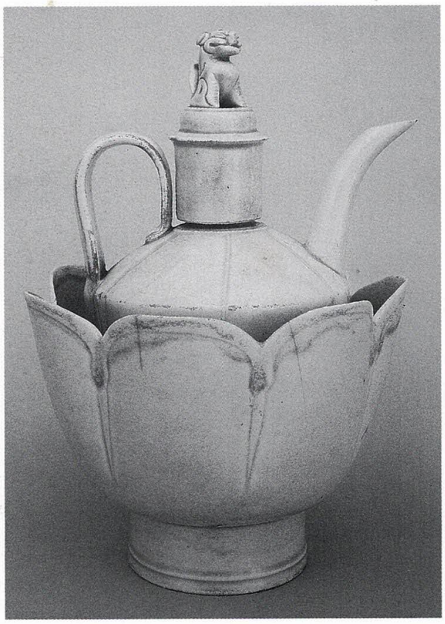

Fig. 1: *Yingqing*-glaze ewer and bowl, Song dynasty, from the Hutian kiln site at Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, after *Zhongguo taoci quanji*, vol. 16 (*Song Yuan qingbaici*), Shanghai and Tokyo, 1984, pl. 63.

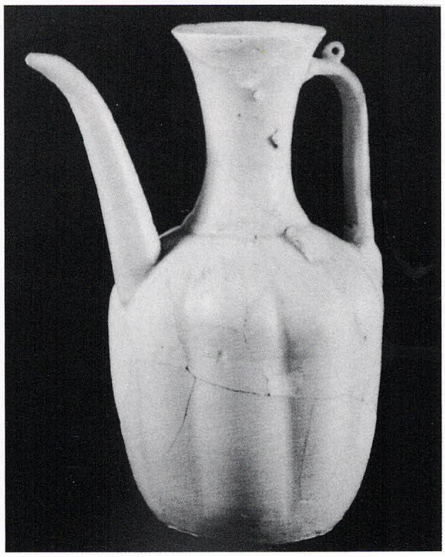

Fig. 2: *Yingqing*-glazed porcelanous ewer, Song dynasty, from the site of a house-foundation in Hutian, Jiangxi province, after *Kaogu*, 2000:12, pl. VI:4.

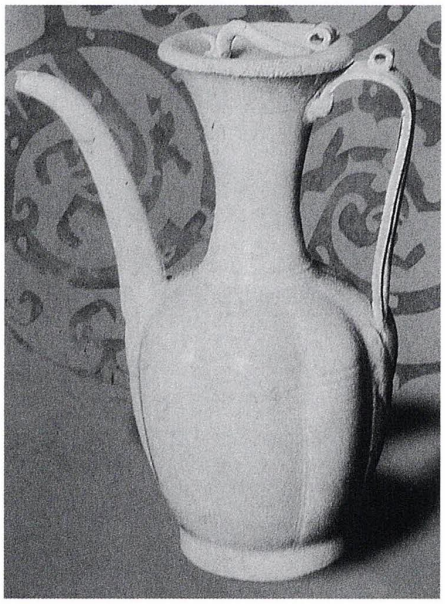

Fig. 3: *Yingqing*-glazed porcelanous ewer, Song dynasty, from a tomb in Fujian province, after *Wenwu*, 1998:12 (cover photo).

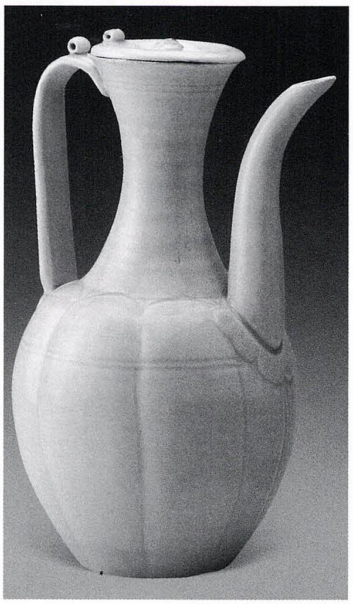

Fig. 4: *Yingqing*-glazed porcelanous ewer with bluish glaze, Song dynasty, Museum of the King of Nanyue, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, after Zhao Ciqiang, *Nanyue cangzhen*, Nanning, 2008, p. 87.

Jingdezhen, in graves and within hoards in numerous provinces, and in museums and private collections worldwide today. Ewers of this particular type have also been found in domestic contexts such as that from a house foundation in Hutian, Jiangxi province, and hence not far from its production site (fig. 2). Although imitations of Jingdezhen's popular *yingqing* wares were produced in Fujian, a ewer excavated from a tomb in that province was accessed to be a Jindezhen product and proves that Jingdezhen wares were not completely supplanted by the local product (fig. 3). Variations in shape and in color are notable within the type as exemplified by two ewers in the Nanyue museum, one with a distinctive bluish glaze (fig. 4) and another with a glaze tending towards a warmer white color (fig. 5). All of these examples, however, and many more like them, exhibit a basic purity of form and simplicity of design and in their grace and cool beauty reflect one aspect of Song sensibility.

1. See "*Empty Vessels, Replenished Minds: The Culture, Practice and Art of Tea*," National Palace Museum, Taipei, 2002, no. 16, p. 40.

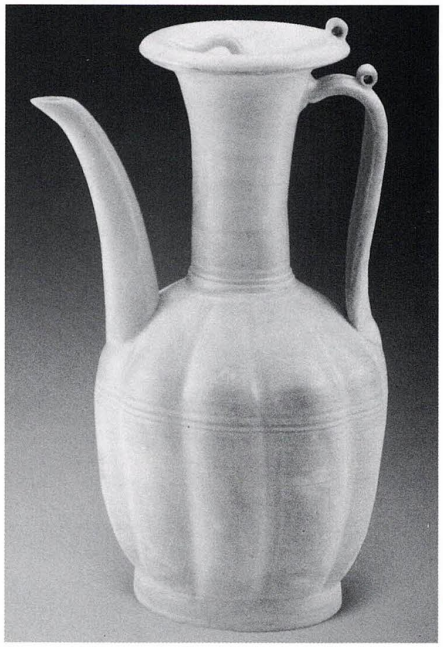

Fig. 5: *Yingqing*-glazed porcelanous ewer with a warm-white glaze, Song dynasty, Museum of the King of Nanyue, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, after Zhao Ciqiang, *Nanyue cangzhen*, Nanning, 2008, p. 88.