Thai Ceramics

Pottery for everyday use has been made in Thailand for thousands of years. Between about 1375 and 1575, however, a variety of glazed and decorated wares intended for export were made in several centers in north central Thailand. These wares have been found in large quantities, usually together with Chinese and Vietnamese wares, as far away as the Philippines, eastern Indonesia, and even Japan, testifying to widespread seaborne trade. In recent decades marine archeologists have found cargoes of thousands of ceramic vessels on shipwrecks from this period, and have greatly increased our understanding of the ships, their routes, and the trade goods they carried.

Sukhothai wares were made of a coarser clay that usually appeared dark gray and speckled after firing. To provide a smooth, light-colored surface on which to paint decorations, Sukhothai potters usually covered their vessels with slip—a thin coating of diluted fine clay—before painting and glazing.

Other Thai ceramic wares (Nos. 24–31)

A number of centers in northern Thailand, such as Kalong and Sankamphaeng, also produced fine high-fired ceramics. Their wares seem to have been used in their own region, but not exported like Sawankhalok and Sukhothai wares.

Substantial new evidence, from archeological excavations, chance finds, and greatly increased technical analysis and scholarly study, comes to light every year. As a result, our understanding of Thailand’s ceramics industries is changing rapidly.