

SUMMARIES OF LECTURES

THE CERAMIC CARGO OF THE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA CONCEPCION

SUMMARY OF A LECTURE GIVEN BY MAURA RINALDI ON 26TH JANUARY 1993

The *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, a Spanish galleon on its way from Manila to Acapulco, sank, near Saipan in the Mariana Islands on the 20th September 1638. Its cargo was recovered in 1987 by Pacific Sea Resources of Singapore.

Compared with the over 1,300 pieces of precious jewellery, the ceramic recovered is rather poor, only about twenty pounds of blue and white porcelain sherds and 156 stoneware and earthenware storage jars.

The bulk of the porcelain cargo may be dated c.1633-7. Dating the storage jars accurately is more difficult as these utilitarian shapes were produced without significant changes for centuries. Jars similar to those found in the *Concepción* cargo were found in shipwrecks dated up to fifty years earlier.

About half of the blue and white sherds from the *Concepción* are Kraak porcelain exclusively from dishes and from 'crow' cups, with no sherds from closed shapes or from *klapmutsen*, although both forms were found in great quantities in the Hatcher cargo of 1640-5. Both dishes and 'crow' cups belong to the most common types and painting is of mediocre quality, though the blue is slightly darker than on Hatcher pieces.

Non-Kraak blue and white sherds are from a variety of small bowls. Most are decorated on the outside with landscape scenes and have on the base a six character Chenghua (1465-87) apocryphal mark. On the inside is a border with a honeycomb motif interspaced with a stylised chrysanthemum, a rare feature.

Unlike the Hatcher cargo which included as many 'Transitional' wares as Kraak, there were only two sherds with the quality and decoration of a 'Transitional' ware, one from a barrel-shaped jar and the other from a cylindrical shape, perhaps a *rolwagen* or a small brushpot.

The most important blue and white sherd is the upper part of a large jar identical to one exhibited in Singapore in 1978.¹

The 156 storage jars are all of oriental provenance except for a small earthenware 'olive jar' of Spanish origin. Eight jars are unmistakably Thai. Nine small wine jars are of a well-documented type made in kilns in southern China. Six jars are of low quality with the upper part larger than the bottom providing a poor fit at the juncture. The largest group of jars numbers 127 (80% of all jars recovered). There is controversy regarding their provenance, some scholars indicating Vietnam and others south China, although the latter seems a more likely possibility. These jars are between 30 and 65 cm high, utilitarian and undecorated, and covered with a seriously eroded brown glaze. Almost all have one or several marks scratched through the glaze. These initials indicate the owner or shipper, or represent one of the symbols used to indicate elements or chemicals: auricalcum, antimony, saltpetre, salt, alum, water, beer and wine vinegars, sulphur. Two of the jars have marks in old Filipino script. Such marks have not been found on any storage jars recovered from Dutch, Portuguese or English shipwrecks which suggests that the engraving of such marks was exclusively a Spanish custom.

The *Concepción's* cargo will be housed in a private museum, in Saipan, and after forty years the collection will be given to the Government of the Mariana Islands.

Pacific Sea Resources, on behalf of the Government of the Mariana Islands, has published a very detailed archaeological report on the salvage of the *Concepción*, which includes my report on the ceramic cargo.

1. S. T. Yeo and J. Martin, *Chinese Blue and White Ceramics*, 1978, pl. 17.