

## **Ancient Trade Route Told in Ceramic Evidences**

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### **Abstract**

Ceramics are very important for the Human History. They can tell about the History, Politics, Society, and Economy of the past of its specific areas. Most of the Archaeologists knew the value of ceramics and study them thoroughly. The major ceramics tradition in ancient Myanmar started in Bronze Age and then flourished in Pyu Period. A picture of the ceramic technology and trade among India, Southeast Asia and Pyu has emerged in the early part of the first millennium CE. Pottery fragments bearing wheel-made designs on their surface were discovered at Beikthano. Those resembling Romano-Indian Rouletted wares were found in Beikthano and Halin. They were also found in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries. Rouletted wares represent a culture originating in the Roman Empire which than spread gradually to northern and southern India. Trade routes between the Roman Empire and India antedated the Christian era. Very similar type, shape and design of the earthenwares are uncovered in Pyu Cities States and ancient Southeast Asian Countries. These archaeological evidences of pottery or earthen ware can tell us about the ceramic trade routes among Ancient Europe, Asia and Southeast Asia.

**Keywords: Ceramic, Pyu, Beikthano, Halin, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Roman Empire**

### **I. Introduction**

Ceramics are very important for the Human History. They can tell about the History, Politics, Society, and Economy of the past. Ceramics also provide the earliest evidence of trade among Europe, Southeast Asia and India. During the transition from prehistoric times to the beginning of Southeast Asian history, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, important types of earthenwares were made in India. In that period Pyu of ancient people built the city states in central Myanmar. And then, India, Southeast Asia and Pyu started interrelationship among them in early part of the first millennium CE.

### **II. Various kinds of ceramics-in Pyu Period**

Various kinds of ceramic were uncovered in Pyu City States. They are pottery, clay figurines, terracotta plaques, beads, tiles, bricks, domestic wares and funerary urns. Among them, I specially focus on the study of Romano-Indian Rouletted ware, Kendi or Libation Jar and Finger Marked Brick. They are found in India and Southeast Asian Countries.

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### **III. Romano-Rouletted ware (India)**

Wheel-made pottery is a very significant and well-known in India since the excavations of Wheeler at Arikamedu in the 1940s. It is known as Romano-Indian Rouletted Ware because it was made in India by craftsmen imitating the Roman decorative technique of rouletting. All the Roman contacts at Arikamedu point to the first century CE. Rouletted ware was found at Arikamedu, Karaikadu and Kodumanul in Tamil nadu; Amaravati, Chandravalli, and Brahmagiri in Andhra Pradesh; Sisulpalgarh in Orissa; Tamluk and Chandraketugarh in Bengal; and Mahasthangarh in BanglaDesh, Anuradhapura, Kantarodai and Mantai in Sri Lanka. This distribution shows a pattern of trade along the east coast of ancient India.

### **IV. Romano-Rouletted ware (Pyu)**

The rouletted pattern sherds also unearthed at Beikthano and Halin provide a valuable addition to the material evidence available on early Indian manufacture and trade into Southeast Asia. The Romano-Indian pottery was probably brought to Beikthano and Halin by Indian or Indian Buddhist traders. The sherds unearthed at Beikthano and Halin with rouletted designs were not Roman but it is not unlikely that south Indians brought the technique to Myanmar. Alternatively we might stretch our imagination and assume that Beikthano and Halin craftsmen developed the technique independently. Whether innovation or imitation it was an improvement in technique and the craftsmen deserve credit for it. The date of the Beikthano's sherds is assumed to be the fourth and fifth century CE.

### **V. Romano-Rouletted ware (Southeast Asia)**

In Southeast Asia, rouletted ware has been excavated, sometimes in dated contexts, in Bali, Java and Vietnam. Three rouletted bowls were found at the site of the Buni Complex on the north coast of Java. Sembiran, a coastal site on the north coast of Bali, is especially rich in rouletted ware sherds. They dated from the last centuries BCE to the early centuries of the CE.

Trade goods from Indian ports to Southeast Asia included glass beads, stone beads, ivory combs, ivory jar, bone dice, as well as Mediterranean-made objects such as bronze Roman Lamps, intaglio seals, local imitations of Roman Arretine ware and Indo-Roman Rouletted pottery bowls.

### **VI. Spouted pot or Libation jar**

The earliest use of the spouted pot can be traced back to the Ubaid Neolithic culture of Mesopotamia, datable to about 3000 BCE. Resembling closely the Kendi or libation jar of Bagan Period is a sprinkler found at Uruk in Mesopotamia. Spouted pots were also used in Taxila about 300 BCE. And they were similar in form to the Beikthano spoute. It is an important evidence for early relationship between Taxila and Beikthano.

### **VII. Spouted pot or Libation jar (India)**

The earliest Indian Libation Jar was excavated at Navdatoli on the southern bank of the Narmada River in Central India. It was dated by the radio carbon analysis to about 1500 BCE and identified as a vessel with which ablutions were performed.

More Indian evidence came to light with the passage of time through diggings in Nevasa, Brahmagiri, Chandravalli, Hastinapura, Rang Mahal and Yeleswaram in different parts of the country. They are described either as the libation jars or sprinklers. Their chronological range spans from 1100 BCE to 600 CE.

They were in use at both Hindu and Buddhist sites in the Krishna River area from the second century BCE onwards, and found in both Brahmagiri and Nagarjunakonda.

### **VIII. Spouted pot or Libation jar (Pyu)**

The excavation at Beikthano which belonged to the early phase, yielded the sherds of libation jar including necks and spouts. They are different from Bagan Period style. Similar sherds of spouts and necks were found at Winka, Halin and Sri Ksetra. But their spouts and necks are very similar to those of India.

### **IV. Libation jar or Kendi (Southeast Asia)**

Earlier researchers noted the spouts and sherds of these Kendi vessels across the surface of Angkor Borei. The term kendu is Malay, and derived from the Sanskrit word kundi (a pot with a spout). It is sometimes called kundika. They are slightly earlier than the kendu vessels in Malaysia and Indonesia. Similar vessel forms are also found at Dvaravati period in Thailand. Thai sites can only be assigned to the period between 600-1000 CE. There is little question that the kendu is associated with the latter half of the first millennium CE, at Oc Eo in the Mekong delta (today Vietnam). And more analysis may allow us to equate kendu production with fine buff ware production. The University of Hawaii/East-West Center and the Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh have conducted research at the site of Angkor Borei in Takeo Province, southern Cambodia since 1995. Both sites date from 100 to 550 CE and research shows that Oc Eo and Angkor Borei are linked by a network of canals. Kendu with a globular body and fine textured paste that fired to a buff colour have been retrieved as surface finds at Angkor Borei and post-date the third century. Charles Nelson Spinks suggests that “this type of drinking bottle was probably brought to Southeast Asia at a very early date by Indian and at one time was probably in widespread use, if not as a drinking bottle at least as a ritual vessel”.

### **V. Finger marked brick (Pyu)**

Bricks with finger marked designs are uncovered in Pyu cities and other ancient Myanmar cities, representing a cultural tradition coinciding with the construction of Mon and Pyu cities in the early centuries of the first millennium. In addition to line markings, there were other marking types, such as Pyu numerals or other patterns. The presence of marked bricks has been verified at the twenty two sites. They are –

- |               |                   |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. Beikthano  | 12. Taungdwingyi  |
| 2. Sri Ksetra | 13. Thagara       |
| 3. Halin      | 14. Pinle         |
| 4. Pinle      | 15. Zothok        |
| 5. Thaton     | 16. Winka         |
| 6. Kyaikkatha | 17. Taikala       |
| 7. Waddi      | 18. Phaang        |
| 8. Thegon     | 19. Waw           |
| 9. Bagan      | 20. Mudon         |
| 10. Mawbi     | 21. Muthin        |
| 11. Tagaung   | 22. Kawgun (cave) |

### **VI. Finger marked brick (Thailand and India)**

In Thailand, finger marked bricks were found in only seven ancient cities. These are:

- Si Thep
- Wangdeng
- Sri Mahosot
- Ta Kae
- Ku Muang
- Mok Kha Laan
- U Taung

Preliminary surveys of Indian and Nepalese sites recorded finger marked bricks in Bihar (Varanasi, Kosambi, Rajagriha and Vaishali), Uttar Pradesh (Kusinaram, Saravasti) and in Kapilavastu. The traditions of finger marked bricks are started by King Asoka in India and then it was wide spread to Southeast Asian countries. Nobody knows about the meaning of those. But some scholars think about that the marks are used as a trade mark or counting mark or traditional symbol mark.

### **VII. Conclusion**

Ceramics are the earliest evidence of information on ancient societies. It also provides the—ancient trade route among ancient Europe, Southeast Asia and India. But, we cannot analyse in detail trade route, because we do not have a contemporary written records. The good archaeological data trace back to the ancient trade route, dating, cultural exchange and interrelationship between India and Southeast Asian countries. Evolution of their types and designs are useful to reconstruct the ideology of ancient people.

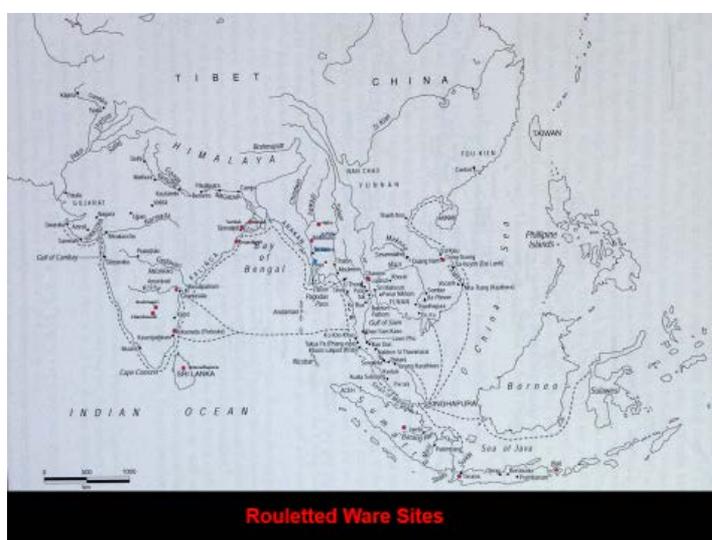
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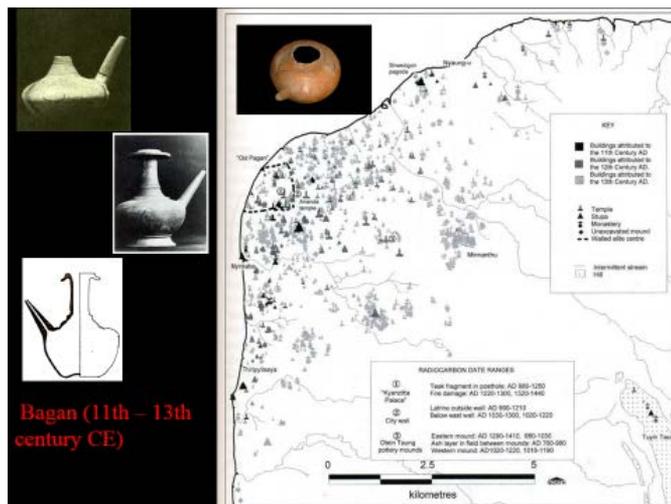
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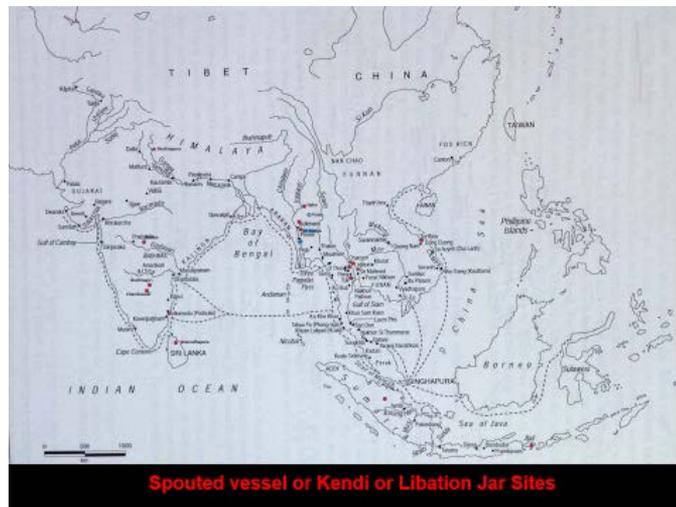
Form Phasook Indrawooth and San Shwe

Figure 1. Rouletted ware sites



From Bob Hudson and San Shwe

Figure 2. Libation jars from Bagan Old City



Form Phasook Indrawooth and San Shwe

Figure 3. Spouted vessel or Kendi or Libation Jar sites



Form Phasook Indrawooth and San Shwe

Figure 4. Finger marked brick sites