



ART GUIDES FOR EDUCATORS:

HỘI AN HOARD



Unknown, Group of Ceramics
from the Hoi An Hoard. 2000.105.106;
.107 A-B; .108.1,2; .109.1-24. (A) 2000.105,
(B) 2000.107.A, (C) 2000.108.1, (D) 2000.106

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MEET THE ARTISTS

Although we do not know names of the artists, we do know the ceramicists who created these goods did so in the late 15th / early 16th century in Vietnam's Red River Delta region. This region was the center of Vietnamese ceramic production, and the ceramics made along the banks of the Red River have been treasured in such places as Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia and Japan since the 14th century.

The Red River begins in the Chinese province of Yunnan and flows southeast through narrow gorges, crosses a large delta, and then empties into the Gulf of Tonkin. The Delta's river network linked pottery-making towns to sources of fine-grained, pale-gray stoneware clay, and then carried finished products to markets and coastal ports where they would have been loaded onto ships traveling throughout Southeast Asia. Ceramic pieces such as these would have been traded for spices, silk, and other goods.

CONSIDER THE CONTEXT

These objects are part of the Hội An Hoard (pronounced hoy ann hoard), a collection of objects recovered from an unwater shipwreck off the coast of Hội An, Vietnam. Today, Hội An is a small coastal city in central Vietnam, home to approximately 88,000 inhabitants. Previously known Champa, this was an important trading port in the 16th and 17th centuries.



(See map of the region <http://latitudes.nu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/hoi-an-map.gif>)

Among Phoenix Art Museum's collection, there are barbed rim dishes, a spouted jar, a *kendi* (a drinking vessel with a rounded body and spout), a pair of *ewers* (decorative pitchers) with openwork panels, and a covered jar that held twenty-three small cups inside.

These blue and white ceramics were created from grey-white clay, high-fired into stoneware, and decorated with cobalt blue underglaze using Vietnamese adaptations of traditional Chinese designs. The first blue and white porcelain was produced in the Jiangxi province of China during the 14th century. North Vietnamese ceramics borrowed some of the forms and motifs from traditional Chinese models, including lotus petals, landscapes, and Chinese mythical creatures, including the *Kylan*. The *Kylan* (or *Qilin*) is a mythical creature with a scaly body like a fish, a deer head, and a lion's tail.

While some objects are decorated with designs inspired by Chinese *motifs* (themes), other pieces reflect the cultural styles of the many places where they would eventually be delivered. Ceramics decorated with symmetrical, regular patterns, and technical precision mimicked the style of Imperial-ware from the Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). These typically were more expensive, and of a higher quality. These were exported throughout Southeast Asia, where wealthy merchants and the aristocracy acquired them. Objects decorated in a looser, more pictorial style were intended for Vietnamese domestic use.

In 1993, fishermen began finding shards of the distinctive grey-white pottery with blue underglazing in their nets. Marine archeological researchers discovered a shipwreck 22 miles off the coast of Hội An, in an area of the South China Sea known as the "Dragon Sea." Treasure hunters began dragging nets and long metal rakes, back and forth across the wreckage, dislodging and fragmenting pots that had been buried for 500 years. In the mid-1990's, the Vietnamese government commissioned an international team of marine archeologists and salvage divers, who eventually recovered more than 150,000 intact ceramic objects from the wreckage, which was more than 230 feet deep.

LOOK CLOSELY

Questions to start a conversation:

- Can you describe the elements of art you see (color, shape, texture, line, etc.)?
- What do you think these objects were used for? What do you see that makes you think that?
- Who would have been the intended consumers for these objects?
- What do you think was the purpose of each object?
- Imagine these ceramic pieces had not been on a ship that had sunk: Would they still be considered valuable? How might their loss and eventual recovery have affected their value?
- What changes would you expect to see on clay objects that had been in saltwater for so long?
- How did so many pieces of fragile ceramics survive being under the sea for 500+ years? Consider how objects could be packed to best protect them from breaking. What materials would hold up after an extended time submerged in water?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SCIENCE

Growing Salt Crystals

Experiment with the process of growing salt crystals (from <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Salt-Crystals>)

Materials

- Glass jar
- 1/2 cup boiling water
- 1/4 - 1/2 cup Epsom salt
- A spoon for stirring
- String
- Pencil
- Paperclip
- Optional: Food coloring

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Instructions

1. Heat water until boiling and remove from heat (children should do this under adult supervision).
2. Stir in Epsom salt until it no longer dissolves. You've just made a supersaturated solution. This means the solution (the liquid) contains more salt than water can usually hold.
3. Fill the jar with solution.
4. Optional: add a few drops of food coloring to the liquid.
5. Cut a piece of string and tie one end to the pencil. Attach the paperclip to the loose end of the string.
6. Lay the pencil over the opening of the jar, so that the string dangles into the solution, with the paperclip serving to hold the string straight (*see image*).
7. Leave the experiment undisturbed for several hours, or overnight, and wait for salt crystals to form along the string. Epsom salt crystals can start growing within a few hours, but might take a couple days. Once you see little crystals on the string, those will usually continue to grow bigger over the next couple weeks.



Note: Sea salt and table salt can take up to a week to form crystals.

8. Have students observe the crystals, and make hypotheses about how salt crystals may form on other materials, such as on pottery.
9. Consider: Would Hội An pottery have developed salt crystals? Why or why not?
10. How would the recovered ceramics need to be treated to avoid damage from salt water? Research the desalination and conservation processes for objects recovered from underwater.

HISTORY

Mapping Trade Routes

- Examine maps and other resources to learn about the types of resources traded throughout Southeast Asia.
- Have students create their own maps indicating the trade routes.

Maritime Archeology

- Because the South China Sea was such a popular trade route, marine archeologists have discovered many ships wrecks filled with historically important treasures.
- Visit <http://mua.apps.uri.edu/HTMLTEST/childrens.htm> to learn more about underwater archeology.
- *For younger students:* Visit the kid's page for games and activities related to protecting underwater cultural heritage (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/>).

- *For older students:*

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is a specialized agency of the United Nations, and is tasked with the protection of world cultural heritage sites. In 2001 they drafted the **Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage**, which sets out basic principles for the protection of underwater cultural heritage (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/>).

1. Have students research the terms of the convention.
2. Imagine the Hội An shipwreck was discovered today, after the adoption of the UNESCO convention. Have students write a persuasive essay arguing either for or against the recovery of the "Hội An Hoard."

ART STARTS

CHIMAERA

The *Kylan* (or *Qilin*) is a mythical Chinese creature with a scaly body like a fish, a deer head, and a lion's tail. The term chimera has come to describe any mythical or fictional animal with parts taken from various animals,

1. Have students each select three different animals and imagine how these might be combined to create a new, mythical creature.
2. Have students draw this new creature, paying attention to textures and colors.
3. Students create a name for their creature and write a paragraph describing its qualities.
4. Visit <http://www.switchzoo.com/zoo.htm> to explore a free, online, animal-creating application.

CERAMIC VESSELS

1. Supply each student with a quantity of clay (consider wet-set clay, which hardens in cold water, if you do not have access to a kiln).
2. Students hand form a vessel, similar to one of the forms from the Hội An Hoard.
3. Have students research Chinese or Vietnamese motifs or symbols, and practice these on sketch paper, to determine how they'd like to decorate their vessel.
4. After the works have hardened or been fired, students can decorate them using blue glaze, or blue acrylic paint, to emulate a blue glaze.
5. Have students write a paragraph describing the function of their piece (utilitarian or decorative).

LEARN MORE

Dragon Sea: A True Tale of Treasure, Archaeology & Greed off the Coast of Vietnam, Frank Pope 2007 (Harcourt).

Dragon Sea: <http://www.dragon-sea.com/gallery.htm>

Hội An Hoard, Kim Faye: <http://thingsasian.com/story/Hoi-hoard-part-one-excavation>

Phoenix Art Museum, e-gallery: [http://egallery.phxart.org/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:18964](http://egallery.phxart.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:18964)