

Announcements

New perspectives on late Tang maritime trade?

Roderick Orlina and Eva Stroeber



A collection of storage jars in the Princessehof Museum, the Netherlands

WITH MORE THAN 120 storage jars, the collection at the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden, is one of the most important and varied worldwide. Most of the jars were found in Indonesia during the first half of the 20th century, when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Nanne Ottema (1874-1955), a notary from Leeuwarden and founding director of the Princessehof Museum, collected Chinese ceramics and built up a very important collection, particularly of Ming export wares. But it was his friend and partner, Anne Tjibbes van der Meulen (1862-1934), who acquired these jars. Even after the death of Ottema, jars continued to be added to the collection, collected mostly by the Ottema-Kingma Foundation. From 1977-1987, Barbara Harrison (1922-2015) served as the director of the Princessehof Museum. Her pioneering work on jars, *Pusaka. Heirloom Jars on Borneo*, was published in 1986.

The oldest jars in the collection date from the Tang dynasty (618-907); these were made in kilns in southern China. Later, groups of jars include those from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The Princessehof collection also includes jars from Cambodia from the 13th century, a number of jars made in kilns in Thailand and Vietnam, and *martabans* made in the kilns of Burma, now Myanmar. This traditional term for storage jars refers to the old harbour of Martaban, Myanmar, from where many of these jars, used on ships, were exported.

A group of Tang jars and the 'Maritime Silk Road'

A group of around 20 jars from the Princessehof collection dates from the 8th-10th century, the late Tang dynasty. Many of these jars were excavated in Central Java near Borobudur, an important Buddhist centre, and acquired there by van der Meulen in the early 20th century. They are thickly potted of light coloured clay, of globular or ovoid shape, with a short or rolled neck, and four or six lug-handles on the shoulder. Some jars also have small spouts. The wood ash-lime glazes are a light brown, yellow, or olive green. All jars are glazed on the exterior as well as inside. These types of jars were made in several kilns in the province of Guangdong in southern

China. The distribution of the excavation sites of Chinese Tang storage jars suggests that they were used in seaborne trade. During the late Tang dynasty there were two great trade routes connecting China with the Middle East and the Mediterranean: the traditional route, known and travelled for centuries since the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), was the Silk Road through the deserts of Central Asia. The Tang dynasty marks the beginning of the *Maritime* Silk Road.

A shipwreck with a spectacular cargo discovered in the waters off Belitung Island, Indonesia, in 1998, dramatically brought the Maritime Silk Road to the attention of an international public. The Belitung shipwreck was a sensation: a Persian or Arab ship sunk on its way to West Asia, its cargo consisting of tens of thousands of pieces of Chinese ceramics, gold and silver. A date on a Chinese bowl suggests that the ship probably sank shortly after 826.

Jars with inscriptions

Two jars in the Princessehof collection bear inscriptions, in both cases below the lip on the shoulder. The inscriptions were incised under the glaze when the jars were made, not added later. The inscription on the large, olive green glazed jar was identified as possibly Manichean. The letter *ghamal* features prominently, overshadowing a smaller unidentified letter. Manichaean script, read from right to left, was devised in the 3rd century and was used exclusively by the followers of Manichaeism, a Persian religion, up until the 10th century. The other jar, of about 40 cm high, has a whitish glaze. It contains an inscription that has yet to be deciphered.

The inscriptions on the Princessehof jars are not the only ones in known existence. Hundreds of jars of the olive brown glazed type were recovered from the Belitung shipwreck, and two of those also have inscriptions. How do we relate the epigraphical information on the Princessehof and other jars found on the Maritime Silk Road jars to the historical context of Tang international trade in the 9th to 10th century?

Trade on the Maritime Silk Road

The collection of Tang dated jars at the Princessehof Museum in Leeuwarden, particularly the ones with inscriptions, and the comparison with shards with inscriptions on the sites of the

Above left:
Jars from the Princessehof collection.

Inset:
The inscription on the large olive green glazed jar, prominently featuring the letter *ghamal*.

Above right:
The collector Nanne Ottema.

Maritime Silk Road leads to two questions. The first refers to the historical sites on Java, close to Borobudur, holy territory, where some of the jars were found. Was it a coincidence? It is reported that metal vessels were inside the jars when they were excavated. Why? Could there be a connection with ritual use in Buddhist ceremonies, depicted on the stone reliefs of Buddhist or Buddhist-Hindu temples of Southeast Asia, like the Borobudur on Java, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Pagan in Myanmar (Burma)? Second, and in reference to the inscriptions on the jars: was the late Tang international seaborne trade between China and West Asia still dominated by the trade network of Persians and the Central Asian trade by the Sogdians?

The authors, Roderick Orlina, an epigraphist and historian, and Eva Stroeber, sinologist and art historian working as curator for Asian ceramics at the Princessehof Museum, Leeuwarden, will develop this inter-disciplinary project into a more comprehensive article, to be published by the end of 2016.

IIAS Outreach Lecture

Dr. Eva Stroeber will give a lecture on the collection of jars: *A Thousand Years of Jars – The Collection of Stoneware Jars in the Princessehof Museum*. After the lecture there will be an opportunity to see and discuss the jars.

Saturday 5 March 2016, 2 pm
Atelier of the Keramiekmuseum Princessehof
Grote Kerkstraat 11
Leeuwarden
Netherlands

The entrance to the lecture is free, but registration is required at: h.m.van.der.minne@iias.nl

The powerful and the powerless

13th Annual Conference of the European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS)
Prague, Czech Republic, 30 March–1 April 2016

POWER RELATIONSHIPS, broadly understood, pervade society on many levels and in many guises. They may be explicit or implicit, acknowledged or hidden, based on outright coercion or, instead, on more subtle forms of coaxing, manipulation, and indoctrination. They can involve individuals as well as collectives. In different contexts such as faith, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, they can render people susceptible to the effects of power in different ways.

Participants will engage with the phenomenon of power in their respective area of research, be it social sciences or in the humanities, and focus on the relationship between those who wield power on the one hand and those who are affected by the decisions of the powerful on the other. By investigating the strategies, conventions, and tensions underlying the interactions between the two sides, we hope the papers of this conference will offer novel insights into such issues as persistence and change in power relationships over time; the shifting positions and multiple roles individuals as well as groups can assume in different contexts and vis-à-vis different counterparts; the significance of symbolic representations of power; historical, moral, religious, and political justifications of inequality; strategies employed in contesting existing power relationships; formal and informal structures established with

the purpose to create, enforce or perpetuate hierarchical relationships; the scope of individual and collective agency in the face of the limiting effects of power. In this way, we hope to expand our knowledge of powerful and powerless in Taiwan and to enrich the discipline of Taiwan Studies.

For further information about the EATS Conference and EATS, please check the website: <http://eats-taiwan.eu>

