

The Types of the Imported Chinese Ceramics Discovered in Saudi Arabia from the 3rd. to the 13th. Cents. (9th.-19th.AD.):

Analytical and Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The present article deals with types of the imported Chinese ceramics discovered in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and certain neighboring countries of the Gulf States. Doubtless, the geographical spread of this type of pottery, on the surfaces of the archaeological sites and within the sequences of the site's strata, is an indicator on the mutual economic relationship between the Arabian Peninsula and the Asian countries. The subjective structure of this article relies on identification, classification and then grouping of the imported Chinese ceramics discovered in Saudi Arabia compared with those types found in the Gulf States.

Before the advent of Islam, the Chinese traders engaged in a strong lasting economic relationship with the Arabian Peninsula. This continues connection reached its zenith after the teachings of Islam have become well known globally. The mutual commercial dealings were based basically on many kinds of commodities, namely the Chinese ceramic wares, such as: bowls, plates, cups, vases, *etc...* These items carried varied elements of decorations and manufactured in more than one style. There were a number of manufacturing -centers(Kilns) located across China, the most important of which are the **following ones:**

- 1.ANHUI.
- 2.CHANGSHA.
- 3.GUANGZHOU(CANTON).
- 4.G UANGDONG.
- 5.JIANGXI.
- 6.ZHEJIANG.
- 7.SHANTOU.
8. [SHAANXISHENSI](#).
9. LONGQUAN.
10. FUJIAN.

These centres produced many types of ceramics to such an extent that certain types of ceramics were named after the mentioned producing-centre.

It seems clearly that the documented historic commercial relationship has been reflected on the ground by discovering numberless of sherds of imported Chinese ceramics at the archaeological Islamic sites which are situated mainly on or near the coasts of Arabia.

The archaeological reports of fieldwork conducted in Saudi Arabia indicate that a number of imported Chinese ceramic wares were unearthed. The striking types of which are the following:

(1). Imported Chinese Longquan Celadon Ceramic:

This type of ceramic found in a number of archaeological sites (such as: Syrian, 'Aththar, 'Antar, Khuraybah, al-Hawra and al-Jar) which are all situated along the western coast of Saudi Arabia. Tentatively, the imported Chinese Longquan Celadon was discovered in the mentioned sites belonging to the period between the 4th. -6th. centuries H. (the 10th. -12th.AD). Varieties of types of this Longquan Celadon ceramic, such as Yue and Dehua, were unearthed in some sites in the Gulf States, they have been dated to the period placed between the 3rd.-7th. centuries H (the 9th. -13th. cents AD).

(2). Imported Chinese Unglazed Celadon:

A few number of this type was discovered in one archaeological site called 'Aththar which is located on the coast of the Red Sea. It is believed that it relates to the 4th. -6th.H centuries (the 10th. -12th.AD. cents.).

(3). Imported Chinese Blue & White Porcelain:

Decorated and undecorated (Plain) imported blue and white Porcelain wares were found in abundant on the west coast of Saudi Arabia, namely in the two sites of 'Aththar and al-Sharjah. The initial assessment of their dates are placed between the 8th. -11th.H centuries (the 14th. -17th.AD cents.). On the same coast where another archaeological site called 'Ulayb is located, this type was unearthed. Comparatively, its date is late and placed between the 10th. -13th. centuries H. (the 16th. -19th.AD. cents.). On the other hand, on the upper section of the west coast where there some ancient ports, such as Dar 'Antar, al-Khuraybah and al-Hawra, the imported Chinese b & w Porcelain sherds were discovered and they dated to time of the Ming and Song dynasties. Early type of which was found in the archaeological site of al-Mabiyat and it is dated to the period placed between the 4th. -5th.H centuries (the 10th. -12th.AD cents).

On the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, late b & w Porcelain wares, along with Annamese wares and Plain Celadon were discovered near the coastal city of al-Jubayal and near the inner city of al-Ahsa'. They were placed between 11th. -12th.H centuries (17th. -18th. cents AD).

In addition to the existence of this type in the coastal sites of the Gulf States, other two types of which are found, viz., Qingbai a Swatow. The former type was dated to the 6th. -8th.centuries H (12th. -14th. cents AD), whereas the latter type was backed to the 10th. -11th. centuries H (the 16th. -17th.cents AD).

4.Imported Chinese Stoneware:

Once again, the two archaeological sites of 'Aththar and al-Sharjah, located on the west coast of Saudi Arabia, are the prominent places where the imported Chinese Stoneware was found, specifically the underglaze grey type. Reports indicate that these findings belong to the Northern Song and Ming dynasties.

Archaeological fieldwork activities along the shores of the Gulf States resulted in finding certain types of the imported Chinese Stoneware, namely: Martaban, Dusun and Changsha. Their dating is placed between the 3rd.-6th. centuries H. (9th. -12th. cents.AD).

Roughly speaking, in the sake of gaining a complete picture about the finding of the imported Chinese ceramics in the Gulf States, neighboring Saudi Arabia from the south and the east, certain types of this kind were discovered.

I. Yemen:

Archaeological missions working along the southern shore of Yemen discovered a number of imported Chinese types, mainly to the north and north-east and west of Aden, where the sites of al-Qarw, Khanfar, kud al-Saylah, Khalfat and Sharwayn are situated. The following are the most common types:

i. Imported Chinese Porcelain:

With its varieties, such as:

- a. Ying Ching.
- b. Tang with ivory colour.
- c. LONGQUAN.

ii. Imported Chinese Celadon:

Its varieties that were found are:

- a. Yueh Chou.
- b. Lung- Chuan.

iii. Imported Glazed Stoneware:

This type was found along with its variety called Yue Stoneware.

Excavations conducted at the archaeological port site of al-Shihir revealed additional types of imported Chinese ceramics, *viz.:*

iv. Imported Chinese Blue & White Porcelain.

v. Stoneware of Dehua type.

vi. Longquan Celadon.

vii. Changsha & Martaban Stoneware.

To the east of the site of al-Shihir, where the port of Shirmah is located, a huge number of pottery sherds belonging to the imported Chinese wares were recovered. Port's excavations revealed the following types of ceramics:

i. Green Stoneware called Yao.

ii. Green Stoneware called Yue.

iii. Ivory Stoneware called Ding.

iv. Porcelain called Qingbai.

Other Chinese ceramics types that were found in certain sites situated near the Yemeni cities of Mawzi', Hays and Mokha, *viz.:*

i. Grey Stoneware glazed with dark brown.

ii. Late Celadon ceramic.

iii. White & Blue Porcelain.

iv. Mono & Multi coloured European Porcelain.

II. Oman:

The latest archaeological diggings in Oman show that two main types of imported Chinese ceramics were discovered, *viz.*:

- i. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic related to the Ming Dynasty.**
- ii. Imported Chinese Celadon ceramic related to Ming Dynasty.**

III. United Arab Emirates:

Recent archaeological activities in the proximity of the two main archaeological sites of Kush and al-Mataf resulted in finding the following ceramic types:

- i. Imported Celadon ceramic of Yue type.**
- ii. White Stoneware related to Northern & Southern Song Dynasty.**
- iii. White Stoneware incised with Luttes flowers.**
- iv. Imported Celadon ceramic of Longquan type.**
- v. Imported White & Blue Porcelain.**

IV. Qatar :

Very limited archaeological fieldwork was conducted in Qatar, nevertheless, the site of al-Zubarah produced certain types of the imported Chinese ceramics:

- i. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic decorated with underglaze black colour.**
- ii. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic decorated with reddish-brown colour.**

V. Bahrain:

Similar to the current condition in Qatar, a few imported Chinese sherds were found only in the Islamic Fort of Bahrain. These pottery sherds belong to a single type of the imported Chinese Porcelain.

VI. Kuwait:

The two archaeological sites of Sa'idah and al-Zur Fort, which are both situated in Failaka Island, provided three types of imported Chinese ceramics, *viz.*:

- i. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic with decorations carried out in blue.**
- ii. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic with decorations executed in black.**
- iii. Imported Chinese Porcelain ceramic decorated with reddish-brown colour.**

These types are dated to a late period of time, specifically to the Qing dynasty (1054-1331H (1644-1912AD). Additionally, there are other archaeological sites in Kuwait, such as: Um al-Namil Island, Bihitah and al-Qusur, all produced similar imported Chinese types of ceramic.

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