

Ceramics from Protohistoric Sites in Central Thailand

by Phasook Indrawooth

Each year, the staff members of the Department of Archaeology, Silpakorn University conduct excavations for the purpose of collecting research data and training the students of Archaeology as well. During the last five years, the Department has concentrated on the Protohistoric Sites (Dvaravati Sites) in Central Thailand.

Dvaravati Kingdom

Dvaravati¹ was the name of an Indianized kingdom (a Mon Kingdom) which embraced the area of modern Siam (Thailand) in the middle of the 6th century AD. It was formed from the break-up of the ancient empire of Fu-nan, the first Indianized kingdom (Pre-Khmer kingdom) whose centre was at Oc Eo², on the maritime fringe of the Mekong River.

For most of five hundred years, the Dvaravati culture dominated the western half of Fu-nan's territory, as Kambuja did the eastern. Although its centre is believed to be situated in the central part of Thailand, its civilization spread to the northeastern and northern parts of Thailand. However early in the 11th century, it fell, a victim to the latter's imperial expansion.

Excavations

The Department of Archaeology focused on the Dvaravati Sites at Singburi³ and Rajburi Provinces. Three sessions of excavations in the habitation areas were carried out at Ban Ku Muang, Singburi Province and one session at Ban Ku Bua, Rajburi Province. Ban Ku Muang is situated in Huay Chan Sub-district, In-buri District, Singburi Province, some 7 kilometers from Singburi-Chainat highway. Ban Ku Muang is almost square, about 650 X 700 meters, enclosed by an earth rampart and a moat averaging 35-50 meters wide. No trace of

monuments lies within the enclosure; most of them are scattered outside the town on rising ground.

Ban Ku Bua is situated 18 kilometers to the south of Rajburi Province, measuring 2,000 meters from north to south and about 800 meters across. It has a single wide moat and a low internal and external rampart, which is destroyed on the north. A small water course meanders through the southern part of the enclosure and, then, finds its way into a loop of the Meklong which seems once to have been the main river.

The deposited soils at these two Dvaravati Sites average more than two meters deep. Almost all of the cultural materials recovered from the excavations consist of potsherds.

This paper will discuss mainly the pottery vessels. Complete pots have rarely been found from Dvaravati deposits. (fig. 1) Almost all

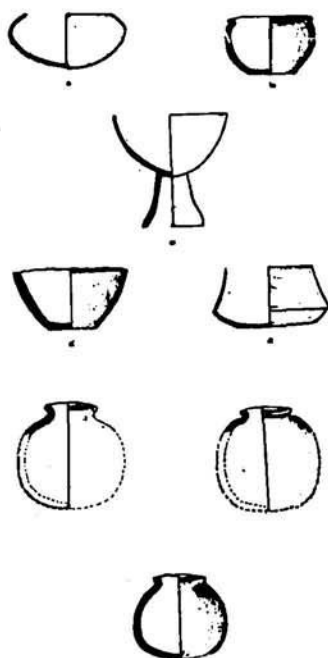


Fig. 1. Different forms of Dvaravati vessels.

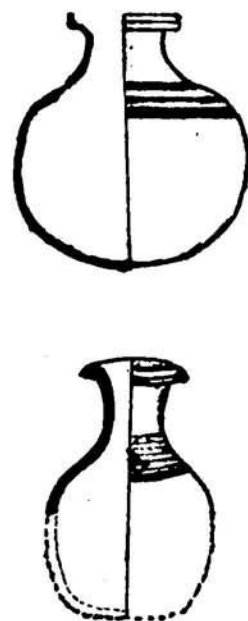


Fig. 2. Vase-necked jar decorated with painting (horizontal stripes: painted red white red).

the finds are in small fragments making their forms hardly recognizable. Sherds with coarse texture are unearthed together with the fine ones. Their colours vary from dark grey to light grey and buff, from orange brown to dull orange. A large number of them have diagonal mat or cord-marking designs. Stamped designs also appear on some fragments. Some sherds show evidence of painting. (fig. 2).

Surface finds from the two Dvaravati sites consist of ceramics of Sukhothai period (13th-15th A.D.) and of the Chinese, Song and Ming Dynasties (10th-16th A.D.)

It should be noted here that ceramics from Ban Ku Muang and Ban Ku Bua could be compared to the Chansen Ceramics of Phase

IV-VI which were dated from 500-1,100 A.D.⁴

Ceramics from Dvaravati deposits can be classified into two main groups: Group A and B. The examples of the former occur in almost every trench while those of the latter are too rare to appear in more than two or three trenches. Potteries of Group A are identified as local products whereas the rare ones might have been imported pots.

Group A Vessels

Various types of vessels belong to this group. They seem to be vessels for every day use.

1. Miniature shallow bowls

They were made with extreme crudeness; the presence of blackened spots on their rims suggests that they were used as lamps. Their surface is uneven. Some are slipped, others unslipped. Most of them are grey in colour. The bottom is either flattened or slightly rounded. Sometimes a shallow bowl is raised on a pedestal consisting of a stem and a flat-bottomed base (fig. 3).

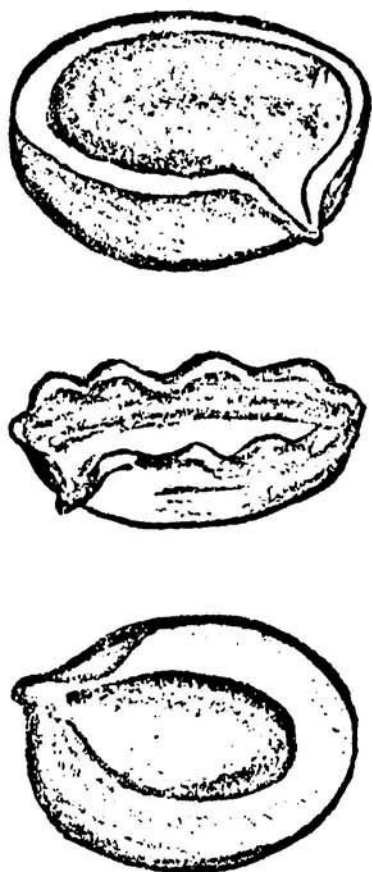


Fig. 3. Miniature shallow bowls used as lamps.

2. Roman lamps

They are lamps formed by two bowls connected by a hollow stem. The smaller bowl was apparently the burner as it shows blackened spot on its lip. The larger bowl served as a fuel reservoir.

Their textures range from coarse to semi-coarse. Some examples are thinly slipped or self-slipped. Most of them are grey to black in colour. This type of lamps was unearthed at every Dvaravati sites (fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Lamps (Roman-style) from In-buri, Singburi Province

3. Jars with spouts

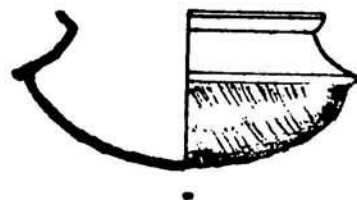
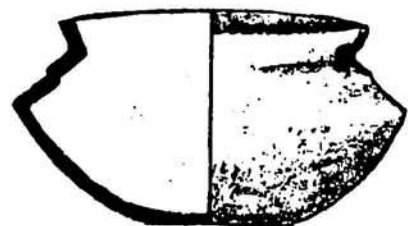
These baluster jars have high flaring necks and globular bodies which rest, sometimes, on a wedge base. On their shoulders were spouts of different shape. Their colours range from dull grey, pink to pinkish orange. Many examples have narrow horizontal painted stripes on the upper inside neck (usually three: red-white-red) and on the outside shoulder below the neck and body joint. Rather complete jars with spouts were discovered from Ban Ku Muang, and Nakhon Pathom. At Ban Ku Bua, only their upper bodies were unearthed (fig. 5).

4. Carinated Vessels

Fragments of this group were found in almost every strata of every trench. Their texture is fairly coarse and moderately hard. They have unslipped surface. The colours are variable, from dark grey to light grey and buff, orange brown, dull orange and dark pink. Their upper bodies are sometimes plain, sometimes having one, two or three ridges separated by wide smooth channels on their shoulders. Their lower bodies are



Fig. 5. Jars with spouts from Ku Bua, Rajburi Province.



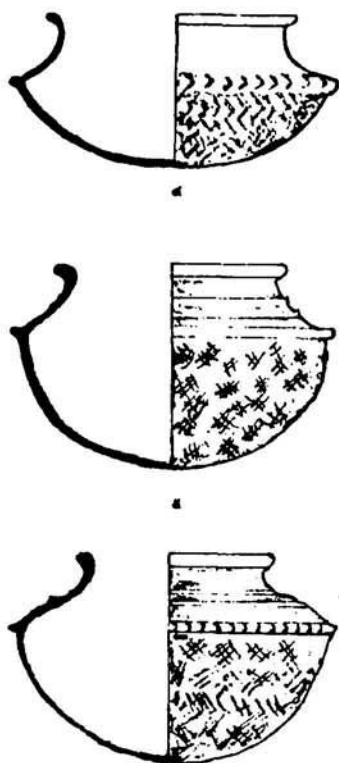


Fig. 6 Carinated vessel from Dvaravati Sites in Central Thailand.

invariably marked by a horizontally applied paddlewrapped with mat or cord marks. Different forms of carinated vessels were discovered from every Dvaravati site: shallow carinated bowl, shallow carinated pot, deep carinated pot or bowl etc. (fig. 6).

This type is held by scholars as typical Dvaravati pottery. In fact, this type seemed to come into existence in Thai region since prehistoric time, and survived to Dvaravati period.

5. Globular jar decorated with wrapped-paddle impression:

A large number of fragments of rims, necks and shoulders of medium sized jars with upright collar necks and globular bodies are recognized in every strata. Their necks and rims are undecorated while most bodies are decorated with wrapped-paddle impressions, vertical cord or mat marking (fig. 7).

Some examples have coarse texture, some fine texture. Their colours vary: light colour as well as dark ones.

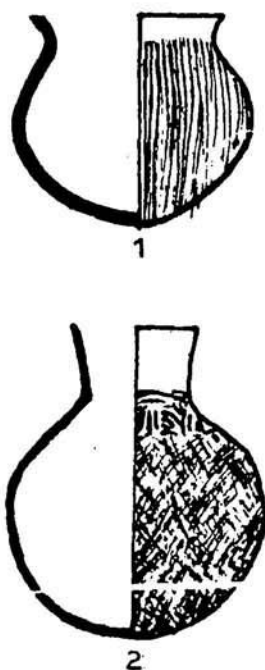


Fig. 7. Globular jar decorated with wrapped paddle impression.

It is believed that mat or cord marking on the body of vessel was derived from the primitive technique of producing pottery from clay-lined bags and baskets. Scholars hold that it is a characteristic and long lived trait of early pottery throughout Asia (Southeast East and North). However, pottery with wrapped-paddle decoration died out quite early in some regions e.g. in China, but in other areas it persists for a long time. In Thailand, this type survived from prehistoric time up to historical time.

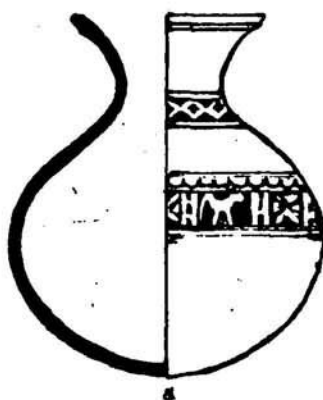


Fig. 8. Globular jar decorated with rectangular stamped designs.

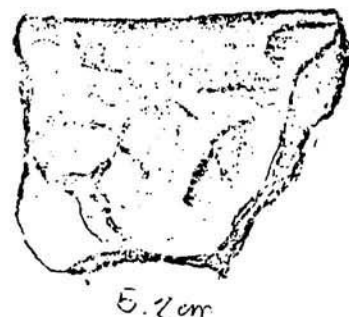
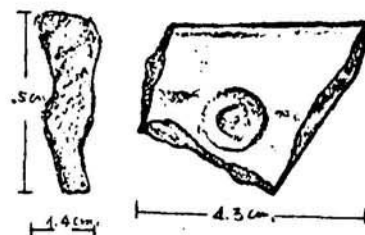
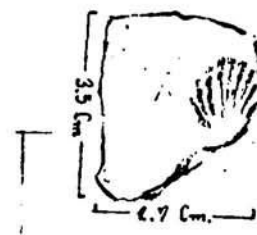


Fig. 9. Stamped design with shell, snail or finger.

Group B Specimens

Fine textured ceramics with decoration belong to this group. Most of them are large globular jars with flaring neck. Their shoulders and bodies are decorated differently (fig. 8).

Variety of incised designs appear on their shoulder, they are: finger, shell or snail impressions; line and wave designs; lozenges design in horizontal incised bands; short diagonal rows of impressed pin-prick-like-dots between rounded horizontal fillets; row of tooth-like triangular indentations etc. (figs. 9-13)

The most distinctive designs are the stamped designs on bodies: a single horizontal register of rec-

tangular stamped designs separated by vertical rows of raised dots. Each rectangular design element contains a single motif: animal, floral or other motif. Popular motifs are: spreading winged swan, facing the front or in profile; elephant; and horse with a rider (figs. 14-15). The arrangement of dot-separated framed reliefs characterized the Dvaravati art. This motif appears decorative at the Chula Pathon Cedi and Wat Yai, Nakhon Pathom Province.

Fig 10. Line and wave designs



Fig 11. Diagonal Rows of Impressed Pin-prick-like-dots



Fig 12. Row of tooth-like Triangular Indentation

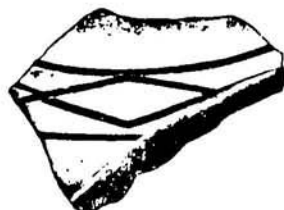


Fig 13. Lozenges Design in Horizontal Incised Bands



Fig 14. A Single Horizontal Register of Rectangular Stamped Designs Separated by vertical rows of Raised Dots. Each rectangular design element contains animal motif. (a-c from Singburi, e-f from Nakhon Pathom)

Footnotes

¹G. Coedes in *Nouvelles données siggraphiques sur L'histoire de l'Indochine centrale*, *Journal Asiatique*, 1958, pp. 129-131.

²L. Malleret, *Les Fouilles D' Oc Eo*, 1944, *BEFEO* XVI, 1, 1951.

³A silver medal (1.7 cm. in diameter) inscribed with the words "S'rid-varavati S'Varapunya" in Pallava characters was found near Monument No. 19.

continued on page 44



Fig. 15 Stamped design with flower motif, (a from Nakhon Pathom, b-c from Singburi).