

CA MAU SHIPWRECK - UNIQUE BOWL

Small chrysanthemum form shallow bowl (Fig. 1 - Ceramics Catalogue Number C-160) with fluted sides and foliated mouthrim. Decorated on the exterior with three floral sprays with underglaze blue stems and leaves accented with overglaze enamel blossoms. The interior center decorated en suite with a single floral spray. Top of the splayed foot is encircled by a double line border with a single line border slightly above. Unglazed edge of footrim has extremely fine grained white colored body. Foot is slightly outward slanting on the interior, and the flat glazed base contains a unique base mark. The fugitive traces of the overglaze enamel detailing on the bowl are only visible in reflected light. They are extremely difficult to see, especially on the sides and interior, and if were not pointed out by a prominent Vietnamese collector of shipwreck ceramics they may well have been overlooked.

The base mark on this small bowl (see Fig. 1), consisting of an overglaze enamel floral blossom within a single underglaze blue circle, is extremely unusual. There is no evidence, neither published nor anecdotal, of a Chinese ceramic base mark with a combination of overglaze enamel along with underglaze blue.

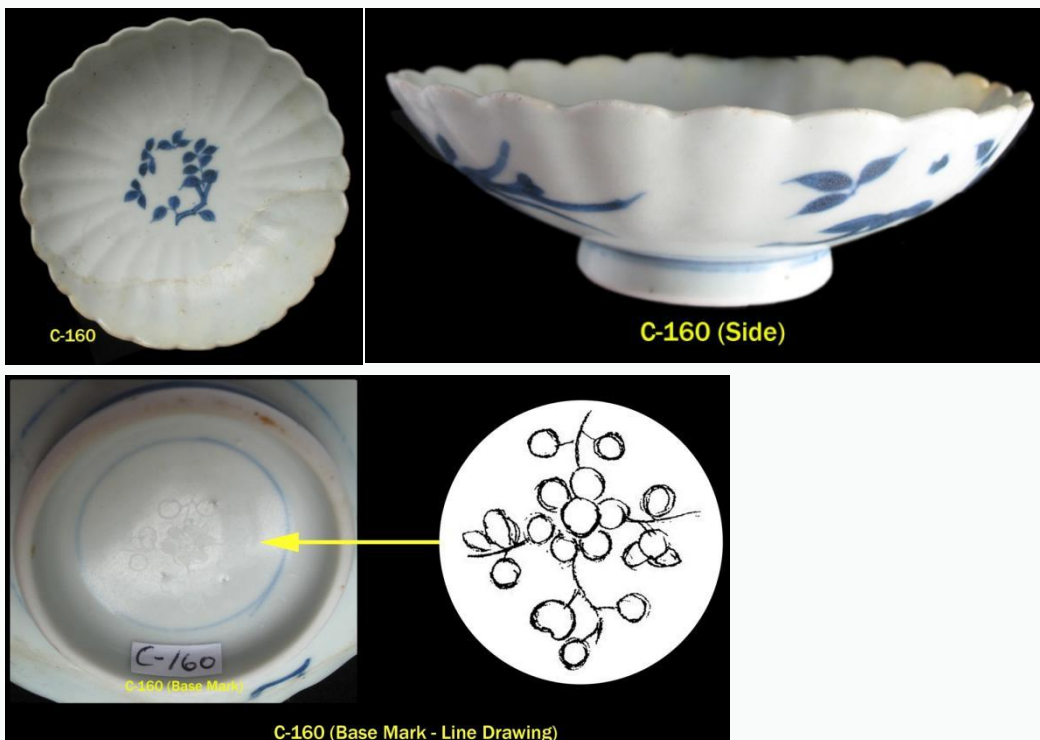


Fig. 1 - Ceramics Catalogue Number C-160 - Small chrysanthemum form shallow bowl, Qing Yong Zheng period (1723 to 1735), circa 1725, recovered from Ca Mau shipwreck, Vietnam, acquired in Saigon, (C-160: D. 12 cm.).

Corresponding items in this series are illustrated in Sotheby's (Amsterdam), *Catalogue for Made in Imperial China – 76,000 Pieces of Chinese Export Porcelain from the Ca Mau Shipwreck, circa 1725*, January 29 - 31, 2007, page 222, lot 978. A bowl in the series is also illustrated in Nguyen Dinh Chien, *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)*, page 186, N.252. The Ca Mau sale included only one lot of these small bowls consisting of three items, which sold for \$1,092 (including the 23.8 percent buyer's premium). Of the 76,000 pieces in the Ca Mau auction there were 46 items included with base marks indicated and consisting of the following:

- lots 109 to 111, 9 cups with four character Yong Zheng mark.
- Lot 112, 9 cups with four character Ruo Shen mark.
- lots 359 to 360, 14 cups with four character Ruo Shen mark.
- Lot 361, 10 cups with four character Ruo Shen mark, and 1 bowl with six character Yong Zheng mark.
- Lot 978, 3 bowls with overglaze enamel floral blossom within a single underglaze blue circle.

Additionally, although not specifically indicated in the catalogue, there were more items in the sale which may have had base marks. These items are lots 104 to 108, consisting of a total of forty-eight "Chrysanthemum Pattern" bowls, and are the same series of bowls as those with twin fish base mark illustrated in Nguyen Dinh Chien, *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)*, page 145, N.141. Also to be noted is that three items with base marks in *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)* were not included in the auction: page 119, N.61, cup with six character Ruo Shen mark; page 121, N.68, cup with four character Ruo Shen mark with figure on horseback under a parasol; and page 145, N.140, bowl with floral sprays and stylized Chinese character with twin fish base mark.

The only other known piece with a mark from the Ca Mau shipwreck is a saucer with brown exterior (see Fig. 2 - **Catalogue Number C-104**). This saucer has the very unusual feature of an underglaze mark in the form of a “+” representing the Chinese character signifying the number ten. The mark is inscribed in blue, but has assumed a distinct blackish hue under the brown glaze of the exterior side of the saucer.



Fig. 2 - Catalogue Number C-104 - Saucer with brown exterior, Qing Yong Zheng period (1723 to 1735), circa. 1725, recovered from Ca Mau shipwreck, Vietnam, acquired in Saigon, (C-104).

The **Ca Mau Shipwreck** was discovered by local fishermen in the summer of 1998 near Ca Mau Island about 90 nautical miles south of Cape Ca Mau, southern Vietnam at a depth of 36 meters. The official excavation of the wrecksite was performed from August 8, 1998 to October 16, 1999 by the government owned Vietnam Salvage Corporation (Visal), the National Museum of Vietnamese History, and the Museum of Ca Mau. A total of over 130,000 ceramics along with numerous broken items and shards dated to the Yong Zheng reign (1723 to 1735) of the Qing Dynasty were recovered from the wrecksite. This total includes official recoveries as well as material recovered earlier by fishermen. Sotheby’s conducted the sale of 76,000 Chinese ceramics from the Ca Mau shipwreck in January 2007.

Wanaporn Khumbutshya, Assistant Curator, Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM), Bangkok University, made the line drawing of the base mark (included in the reference photos) and assisted in the research and preparation of this article.

References - Partial Listing

Asian Art, 2006. December, "Made in Imperial China," page 23.

Field Notes: Saigon - April 2006.

McGlyn, Hugh - April 2007. Personal discussions in Bangkok - Hugh McGlyn of London attended the Ca Mau auction in Amsterdam and provided a firsthand account of the proceedings.

Nguyen Dinh Chien, 2002. *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)*. Hanoi: The National Museum of Vietnamese History.

Sotheby's , 2006. Press Release, November 2, 2006. Made in Imperial China: Sotheby's to sell vast cargo of 18th century Chinese Porcelain recently recovered by the Vietnamese Government after 280 years lost on the sea bed of the South China Seas. London: Sotheby's.

Sotheby's Amsterdam, 2007. *Made in Imperial China – 76,000 Pieces of Chinese Export Porcelain from the Ca Mau Shipwreck, circa 1725*, Auction Catalogue, 29-31 January 2007. Amsterdam: Sotheby's.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum (SEACM), Bangkok University - Shipwreck Data Base References and Photos.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter, 2006. Volume III, Number 6, November – December. "Ca Mau shipwreck," p. 1.

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter, Volume X Number 2, Oct 2016 – Jan 2017, "Ca Mau Shipwreck – New Discoveries (Part I)," page 3. (See Research Papers Prepared Section)

Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum Newsletter, Volume X Number 3, Feb 2017 – May 2017, "Ca Mau Shipwreck – New Discoveries (Part II of II)," page 3. (See Research Papers Prepared Section)

Tai Lieu, 2003. Co Vat Tinh Hoa (Vietnam Antiques Magazine), No. 4, December, pp. 14 – 19. “Vietnamese Sea and the Ancient Ceramics – Porcelain Road.”

Viet Nam News, May 11, 2004. Ca Mau Plans Shipwreck Artifact Auction.

Research Papers Prepared Section: Ca Mau Shipwreck - Blue & White Dish with Underglaze Red, Celadon, & Incising.