



*An underwater archaeologists triangulates the position of artifacts for record purposes...*



*.... then records the locations.*

## **Status Report**

# **Underwater Archaeological Investigation of the Rang Kwien Shipwreck**

*by Rosa Tenazas*

Since the first investigation in July-August of 1977, a large quantity of cultural materials have been recovered by the underwater archaeology team of the Fine Arts Department of Thailand under the leadership of Mr. Vidya Intakosai from the Rang Kwien site shipwreck, off Choburi Province on the southeastern Gulf of Thailand.

A preliminary report published by this same writer in the first issue of the SAPFA Digest had dated the wreck sometime in the later part of the 13th century, A.D. on the basis of a category of Chinese globular 4-eared jar with olive-brown glaze and relatively small footrim which is identical to a type excavated by this writer in Pila, Laguna in 1967-68 and attributed a similar date. After at least three additional seasons of investigations by the Fine Arts Department, additional quantities of ceramics have been recovered. A large majority of these are identifiable as Annamese or Vietnamese in origin. An interesting design on one of the bowls is an attempt at copying a prevalent design of a spray of pomegranate and lotus flowers tied with a ribbon found on Chinese classic early blue-and-white productions prior to the 14th century, A.D.

Archaeological recoveries of

organic materials, as well as placements of certain categories of utilitarian vessels have shed interesting insights into socio-cultural aspects of the lives of the people in the ship when it foundered off the southeast Gulf of Thailand. For instance, investigations had shown that there were two main categories of equipment on the bases of dispositions as well as quality and quantity. The more sophisticated assemblage was found to be concentrated on what was determined as the stern portion of the ship while the clustering mostly of the more

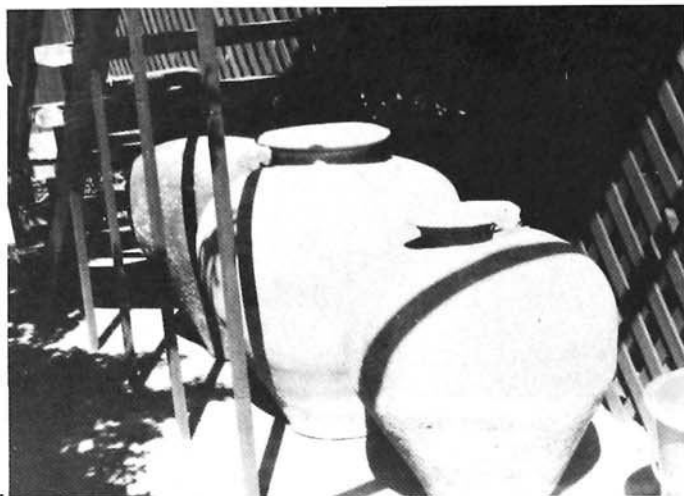


*Hull of partly exposed ship in Rang Kwien*

base types of wares and the earthenwares were confined to the bow end of the vessel. A couple of intricately made gold bracelets were



*Artifacts found in situ surrounding the shipwreck.*



*Heavy large storage jars of the type identified as Khmer recovered from the shipwreck.*



*Ceramics recovered from the wreck include pieces of Chinese, Annamese and Thai provenance.*

recovered from the stern end of the ship.

In addition to betel nuts and a lime container which were recovered from the earlier excavations indicating the indigenous practice of betel nut chewing, a particular culinary preference was indicated by the later recoveries of a quantity of fragile fragments of what are identified as duck's egg-shells. Ceramic as well as stone mortars were also recovered perhaps used for grinding herbs for medicinal purposes or, as in the case of the ceramic category, in connection with food preparation such as the extant Thai practice of preparing "somtum" (a spicy salad concoction mainly from shredded green papaya). Aside from the varieties of cooking pots, one of the unique recoveries was a small ladle fashioned from half the nut of a small specie of coconut.

The storage vessels range from

very large jars to smaller varieties, the majority type being with distinctive gray bodies with stamped designs around the shoulders which are generally assigned a Khmer provenance and attribution. The earthenware cooking pot varieties, on the other hand, are identified as products from the isthmian portion of southwest Thailand.

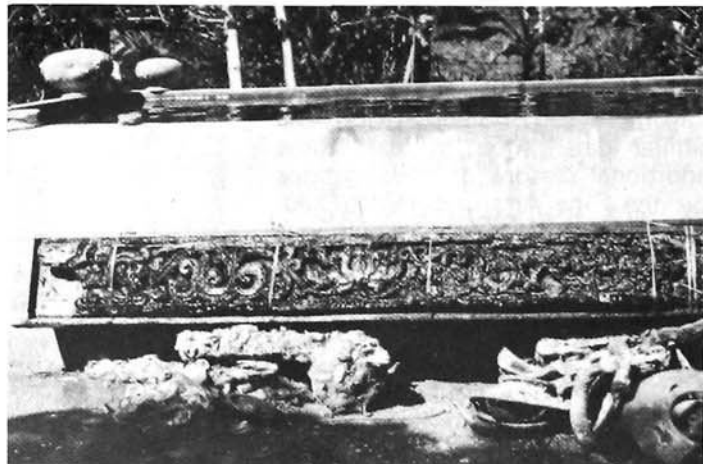
As mentioned in the earlier report the ship had carried metal ingots as well as elephant tusks. Many questions are still begging to be answered concerning the cultural context of this shipwreck such as what its port of origin was including those of its passengers and crew and the nature of the travels. In the meantime all that may be said is that considering the wide variety of the materials thus far recovered, we are provided a glimpse of the various ports of call the vessel had made before its untimely sinking in Rang Kwien.



*Types of earthenware used on board by the crew.*



*Gold ornaments, part of the recovery from the shipwreck.*



*One of carved panels recovered from the castles of the ship*