

S i a m e s e F a y e n c e .

The Art of Crockery making was according to tradition introduced into Siam from China about the year 1150 when a Siamese prince, Phra Ruang, brought with him from China a master potter, Tu Liang, and some craftsmen to establish kilns near the town of Swankhalok, situated on the river of that name, and where suitable clay was ^{to be} found. The place where the industry was started is in our days called ~~Tau~~ Liang, and the manufacture went on right up to the year 1766-67 when the Burmese invaded the kingdom of Siam, sacking all towns that lay in their way as well as the capital, Ayuthia. The invaders also destroyed the potteries that in the course of time had been established by the descendants of the masterpotter Tu Liang and his men, and the art of ~~crockery~~ - making in Siam ^{thus} ~~this~~ became from the year 1767 a lost art. It was replaced by fayence made in China after the old designs, but after a while blue ^{crockery} ~~crockery~~ with chinese ~~decoratives~~ superseded the old Siamese patterns.

According to the late colonel Gerini, who ranks as one of if not as ~~the~~ the greatest authority on things Siamese, the early industry at Swankhalok kept pace with the development in China, the crockery at first being craquelé (crackled) and monochrome, white, cream-yellow, rose and celadon in colour. During the "Ming" period (1368 - 1643) the Siam Ware was decorated with Siamese designs in blue colour imported from China, and in due time the polychrome (many-coloured) style of decoration was introduced, the enamels being imported from China as none existed in the country.

The kingdom of Siam by the way was tributary to the Chinese Empire, the tribute being paid at certain intervals of time, and it was on ~~such~~ a journey that Phra Ruang in about the year 1150 introduced the art of crockery-making into his country. Teakwood formed one of the principal Siamese tributary objects and it is said that the pillars in the famous Temple of Heaven near Peking are of Siamese ^{Teak} ~~teak~~.

. The necessary ingredients for decorating the Swankhalok products came from China, but the style of decoration was

Siamese though some figures ^{which} ~~which~~ form part of the designs have a Chinese look about them and which is ~~the~~ attributed to the potters. In the course of time the descendants of the first craftsmen who took into themselves Siamese ~~wives~~ were joined by new comers bringing the ingredients, hence the Chinese look of some faces, the Siamese say.

No clay or paste similar to the superior Chinese Kao-lin was discovered in Siam, and for this reason the structure of the Siam fayence is coarse and the ware heavy. The people being simple in their habits and cultivators of the soil (chiefly rice) the form of their ~~crocker~~ ~~ery~~ is also simple, there being no finely shaped ~~vases~~ produced as in China. The rickety character of the houses, which are erected on posts and made of thin wooden boards or the leaves of the attap-palm with mere or less shaky floors, has doubtless also prevented the manufacture of fancy forms of crockery ware which would be exposed to breakage and destruction in a higher degree than would be the case in dwelling-houses of a more solid construction.

The manufacture of ~~crocker~~ ~~ery~~ reached its highwater mark in the 17th century when seagoing junks came up to Swankhalok to load crockery which was distributed along the littoral of the Gulf of Siam, some finding its way to Borneo and round the Malay peninsula across to Sumatra. The ware was also sent by the various roads into the interior of Siam and some even to Burmah. With the silting up of the Swankhalok river the industry declined and it was very much on the down-grade when the Burmese invasion of Siam 1766 - 1767 completely put an end to it. According to Colonel Berini not only common household crockery was produced but figures of animals and birds, for instance the fabulous rajasiha - lion - and the Kathilinga - a bird with an elephants trunk. Toros, pedestals for columns and figures of buddhist divinities were also made, and all for the purpose of decorating the temples round Swankhalok. Some fragments are occasionally found among the ruins by digging, and Colonel Gerini on behalf of the Siamese Government made excavations at Tau Lieng in the beginning of the nineties of ^{last} ~~last~~ century and brought his finds to Bangkok where some may be seen in the museum. The ruined ^{kilns} ~~kilns~~ were numerous and proved that the industry once must have been great.

The polychrome (manycoloured) decoration of the Siamese crockery was introduced ~~then~~ during the last years of the "Ming" period (1368 - 1643), but the ~~execution~~ ^{however} of the early designs ^{well} they may have been finished in watercolours on paper, and the Siamese were no novices in this art, is not very well done. The enamel is thickly laid on and the finish compared with the Chinese of the same date, falls very far behind in artistic workmanship; but in return the Siamese ware, and for the very reason that the enamels have been put liberally on, is very striking and decorative when several pieces are grouped together. ~~It~~ ^{It} lays no claim to any artistic development or value as the Chinese porcelain underwent in the course of time, but it suited the simple tastes of the people and to a certain extent the potters improved the designs and finish of the decorations employed in embellishing the Siamese crockery were.

The manufacture at Sankalot and at other ^{places} ~~places~~ continued right up to 1767, and at the same time the ware itself was made thinner and consequently ^{less} ~~is~~ heavy. ~~It~~ ^{It} is said that a finer earth or ~~clay~~ (paste) was imported from China partly to be mixed with the Siamese clay and partly to be employed unmixed for the manufacture of crockery for the Kings of Siam and their ^{numerous} ~~large~~ family. Siamese experts maintain that there thus are three groups of Siamese fayence, the old heavy group, a medium heavy one and a lighter group, besides the polychrome, light ware made ^{to order} ~~before~~ in China after the fall of Ayuthia 1767, when the rulers of Siam, desiring to preserve the old patterns, sent men to China for the purpose of getting the ware reproduced in the old style.

Chinese porcelain came into the country with the ^{junks} ~~junks~~ during, the long intercourse between Siam and China and old "Ming" blue ware is at times found but painted over with enamels in ^{various} ~~various~~ colours after Siamese designs. Porcelain was later made to order in China, and the ^{decorations} ~~decorations~~ there are entirely different from the Chinese style whilst the forms are ^{limited} ~~limited~~ to cups, bowls and low vases which suited the Siamese better than any other shapes. According to experts the style of decoration of this porcelain is partly Siamese partly ^{Indo} ~~Pudo~~ - Persian, the Chinese also manufacturing porcelain for

the Indian and Persian markets it seems. Porcelain was doubtless also included among return presents of the emperors of China to their tributaries among whom were the kings of Siam.-

The Siamese are Buddhists and, as mentioned earlier, the potteries at Swankhalok produced figures etc for ornamenting the temples. When the industry declined the manufacture of such figures ceased and with the advent of the polychrome style of decoration the Siamese, in order to obtain "Merit", gave to the temples bowls, cups, saucers and trays to be broken up and used for the mosaic-works in the temples or for decorating the fable-figures connected with the temple architecture. In ruined Ayuthia and other sacked, old towns, half-~~tr~~idden in the jungle, one finds these mosaics and also in the oldest temples or wats of Bangkok which after the destruction of Ayuthia 1767 became the capital of Siam. Saucers and vases were besides sunk whole into ^{the} mortar work of the walls of the temples, forming with their colours fine-looking decorations at a distance like the smaller mosaics. Collectors paid very good prices for such pieces broken out of the masonry until a police regulation put a stop to this practice and to despoiling the temples of their small bronze buddhas which were easy to ^{slip} ~~slide~~ into one's coatpockets.

After the year 1800 the Siamese became more chary of parting with their fayence for this purpose and ^{what} ~~with~~ they had left was devoted as ^{receptacles} ~~receptacles~~ for bones ^{and} ~~ashes~~ after cremation ^{the} ~~of~~ the dead being cremated in Siam and not barried. ^{One} there-for finds that the wats or temples ^{built} ~~built~~ after the year 1800 have their mosaic-works formed of fragments of Chinese and European fayence and porcelain whilst rosettes or flowers formed of polychrome crockery-ware are exceptional decorations.

Beside the polychrome group of fayence is a black-enamelled one, but opinions are divided as to what period it dates from ^{but} ~~but~~ both groupes have existed at the same time. It has been opined that the black-enamelled group was reserved for Royalty and the higher priest-hood, ~~the~~ cups for eating rice are painted green inside whilst the polychrome ricecups are white on the inside; but the bowls of both groups are all white on the inside without any distinction so far.

The polychrome crockery is found in various nuances of green, blue, pink, yellow, and red colours decorated with floral designs in as many as seven colours and this group and the black ware have generally in common a "tepanom", a figure rising up to the waist out of a pink or white lotus flower the sacred flower of the Buddhists. The "tepanom" is posing in a praying attitude and is ^{adorned} adorned with ornaments on head, ^{neck} neck, arms, wrists and round the chest in yellow or red enamel. In addition to the "tepanom" the black ware has a "norasing" which also is a mythological or fable-figure shaped somewhat like a woman but having a tail and a swan's feet. The "norasing" poses in a listening or respectful attitude, with hands daintily placed one on the other and the fingertips of one hand touching lightly the ground. The heads of both figures are set in an aureole of rust-red colour, and pink flames on black ground separate the "tepanom" from the "norasing". ^{Cups} cups, saucers, low vases and bowls with lids for holding rice are common to both groups and also cinerary-urns, but black enamelled ones are very rare.

The cinerary-urns were, after having received the bones of the cremated, deposited in the temples, whence they were removed to be sold, the relics being deposited in other receptacles; or sacrilegious hands have stolen the ^{urns} urns. When the supply gradually became exhausted the smaller black and polychrome bowls with lids were made to do service for ^{urns} urns, to be removed in their turn and replaced by other, less valuable receptacles than the black or polychrome fayences. The temples were for a long time the hunting grounds of collectors, and in out of the way places one may still come across cinerary-urns. In the year 1903 was discovered a sacked, forgotten town where many interesting finds were made and there are doubtless other such hidden away in the forests of Siam.

It has been mentioned that after the fall of Ayuthia 1767 the kings of Siam sent men to China for the purpose of reproducing the old Siamese style of decoration on the crockery ordered for the Siamese market. This was also done, but the enamelling of the ware is of a much finer finish; one may say naturally. The bowls, vases and cups were also made of a finer quality of clay than what existed

in Siam and are whiter in colour and lighter in weight than the Siamese ware. To distinguish it from the latter it was called China Swankhalok and some was also manufactured but proved too expensive for the common people and was replaced by cheap, blue ware from China made near Canton.

With the establishment of Bangkok as the capital city of Siam Chinese porcelain was made more accessible, but its high price prevented it being ~~used~~^{used} by others but the Siamese nobles and rich Chinese merchant. It is to be deplored that no date-marks are to be seen on the special porcelain which came before this event as return presents from China to the Siamese rulers and highest officials, but cups and bowls from the Yung-cheng period (1722 - 1735) have been fixed, yet they may have come to Siam later than 1767. The finest pieces are no doubt those of the Chien-lung period (1735 - 1796) which also are without date-marks however as are those of the Chia-ching period (1796 - 1820). The Siamese seemed to be so taken up with the beauty of the decoration of this porcelain that they composed a special Siamese design with motives from their own mythology. During the reign of the emperor Tao Kuang (1821 - 1850) a few sets of bowls and cups were also decorated with this special design and there is here no mistaking the Siamese style. Only a few cups from these special sets exist however, and they are more to be classed as curiosities than as specially manufactured porcelain for the Siamese market like what was made to order in China, perhaps as early as during the reign of the emperor Yung-cheng. During the period, or reign, of the emperor Tao-kuang other porcelain than that decorated with the special Siamese design was made for the Siamese market, but not to order, and date-marks are generally to be found on this porcelain as well as on most of the porcelain made for the Siamese market after the year 1850 and decorated in non-Chinese or in Chinese style, but no longer to order.

In the collection of Siamese ware exhibited at the art Institute of Chicago and which embraces 235 pieces are to be seen the polychrome and black enamelled groups together with Chinese porcelain made for the Siamese market. Several experts opine that the heaviest pieces with the enamel laid thickly on date from the end of the "Ming"

period 1643 like one or two yellow rice-cups in the collection, the thickness of the enamel being peculiar to the "Ming" period. Others are of the opinion that the heavy Siam Ware dates from about the year 1725 however.

The porcelain dates from about 1722 up to 1850 and may in the opinion of many be the prettiest, but grouped together with, or without this special class of porcelain, the Siamese Fayence has a distinctive style or individuality, being unpretentious in appearance but striking, and holding its own in the annals of the history of the art of crockery making.

The collection was acquired during a nine years stay in Siam, from 1891 to 1900, and most of it in Bangkok. Now a days it is very difficult if not impossible to get together such a collection, the Siamese treasuring their old ware and the pawnshop owners being alive to the scarcity of it.