

International Conference

‘Ancient Khmer and Southeast Asian Ceramics: New Archaeological Findings, Production and Revival of Techniques’

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Title: A Case Study of a Khmer Elephant Jar

Panel, Part I: New Perspectives in our Understanding of Ancient Ceramics

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In 1985 an extraordinary green-glazed, Khmer elephant jar was discovered in Tak Province, Thailand and purchased by a Thai collector. It is now in the collection of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum, Bangkok University, Rangsit. The jar, dated between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is unprecedented in the Khmer ceramic repertoire. Its exceptionally large size and elaborate decoration are rare characteristics and these aspects plus its pristine condition given that the jar was buried in the ground for at least 800 years evoked reactions amongst the public that the piece was not genuine. Further discoveries, additional research, and scientific testing, however, confirm that this elephant jar is genuine and a fine example of the genius of the Khmer potters’ creativity and skillful workmanship. This paper begins with a background of the discovery of the piece, followed by a description of the technical characteristics and an examination of comparative pieces; then concludes with a discussion of the iconography, and the possible meaning and function of the jar in Khmer society.