

The Martaban trade: An examination of the literature from the seventh century until the eighteenth century.

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## **The Martaban Trade: An Examination of the Literature from the Seventh Century until the Eighteenth Century**

Pamela Gutman

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### Abstract

Epigraphic and literary evidence for a pottery tradition in Lower Burma dating from the early centuries of the present era are discussed. The tradition is mentioned first in Buddhist texts, and is alluded to in Chinese and Indian histories. A Sanskrit inscription of around the eighth century A.D. referring to Kalasapura, the city of jars, coincides with finds at sites in Lower Burma where contact with both eastern India and Dvaravati is evidenced in unglazed wares. By the eleventh century, Mon people around the Gulf of Martaban, particularly between Twante and Moulmein, influenced the pottery of Pagan, seen in illustrations in frescoes and glazed terracotta plaques. Ports around this coastline were important links in the China-India porcelain trade and

later in the export of Sawankhalok and other Siamese wares, as well as glazed wares from sites around the Gulf. Arab, Chinese, and European sources trace the history of this trade from the fourteenth century until its decline in the eighteenth century.

## *The Martaban Trade: An Examination of the Literature from the Seventh Century until the Eighteenth Century*



PAMELA GUTMAN

THE STUDY OF BURMESE POTTERY is an almost virgin field, and the role of Burma in the ancient pottery trade of East and Southeast Asia has hitherto been neglected. This paper seeks to examine the importance of the ports of southern Burma, particularly Martaban, to that trade. Until recently, the few Burmese writers on the subject claimed that all pots known as "Martabans" originated at that port (Than Tun 1972–73). Western scholars, on the other hand, went so far as to assume that "the nomenclature arose from the fact that the port was an important trans-shipment centre for Chinese products to the West, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries" (Brown 1977: 1). Both are only partially correct. An examination of epigraphic and literary sources proves beyond doubt that the area around Martaban was renowned for its pottery from at least the seventh century A.D. In the absence of a standard collection of Burmese pottery it is difficult, although not impossible, to establish its origin and nature. The stoneware storage jars generally known as Martaban were produced in Burma by the eleventh century, long before the name appears as a generic term in the literature. We are not concerned here with those Martabans that do not originate from southern Burma nor passed through its ports, as these have already been dealt with satisfactorily (Adhyatman and Lammers 1977; Miedema 1964; Moore 1979).

### DEVELOPMENTS OF THE SEVENTH TO ELEVENTH CENTURIES

The *Chiu T'ang-shu* (197) and the *Hsin T'ang-shu* (222B) refer to Chia-lo-she-fo (or fu), a country to the north of Dvaravati. In the *Ts'ang-shu* (970), the same place is called Chia-la-she-fen, and is located to the west. The name has been identified by P. Pelliot and G. H. Luce as Kalāpura, "city of pots," mentioned in the eleventh-century Indian *Kathāsanisagara* as a coastal town of Suvarnadvipa (Luce 1969–70, 1, 20, n. 58; Pelliot 1904:360–361; Yamamoto 1979:1144). It has been considered that Kalāpura was situated along the coast of the Bay of Bengal somewhere between Tavoy and Rangoon. That it was pos-

Pamela Gutman is Honorary Associate Fellow in the Department of History, University of Sydney.

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The Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert: Volume I, the criterion of integrability distorts the conversion rate.

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