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## Malaysia Discovers Shipwreck With Ming Dynasty Ceramic Pots

A 19th century ship laden with Chinese blue and white ceramics including some pots made during the Ming Dynasty has been discovered off Malaysia, an official announced Monday.

Kamarul Baharin Buyong, director of the Department of Museums and Antiquities, described the find as "rare", saying it would also shed light on old maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia.

Kamarul said the ship, located in waters off the southern Johor state, had been named "Desaru" after the nearby beach.

"The ceramics on board this shipwreck are mainly Chinese blue and white, made for the Southeast Asian markets.

"The ship's location in deep muddy bottom has protected the pottery in pristine quality despite its age," he told reporters.

The museum exhibited some of the ceramics, including porcelain dishes and plates and teapots found in the wreck.

Kamarul said the ceramic samples recovered were from the Jingdezhen kilns in China.

"Other valuable objects are teapots from the Yixing, which is known for the manufacture of best quality teapots until today.

"These teapots are still being favored by tea connoisseurs. Other ceramic pieces are pots made during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)," he added.

Kamarul said Malaysia was ready to cooperate with Chinese authorities to gather more information about the shipwreck, adding that steps were being taken to ensure its safety.

"The site will be proposed to be declared an archaeological site and any unauthorized diving activities will be prohibited," he said.

One museum official said the shipwreck was first discovered by fishermen.

Sten Sjostrand, managing director of Nanhai Marine Archaeology Sdn. Bhd., which is collaborating with the Malaysian authorities in investigating the site, said the ship could be around 30 meters (90 feet) in length.

The stamps in the base of some Yixing teapots indicate a manufacturing period of 1821-1850, he said.

Sjostrand said a wood sample from the wreck indicated that the ship, which was discovered in May, was built in China.

"As no similar ship from this time has ever been reported, the ship's remains and its construction details are of greatest importance for charting shipbuilding techniques prevailing in Asia around the 19th century," he said.

Sjostrand expressed concern that fishing trawlers had damaged the shipwreck site, adding that "the entire surface is littered with shards of various types."

"Large boats are seen trawling every night in and around the wreck site, consequently continuing destroying the site," he said.

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Sjostrand said it was likely that the ship was sailing from Canton to Malacca, which was then a bustling port, when it could have hit rocks and foundered during bad weather.

Kamarul said Maritime Archaeology Malaysia would hold an exhibition to showcase ten shipwrecks and their cargo, dating from the 14th to 16th and 19th centuries from November 15, 2001.

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