

THE EARLIEST DOCUMENTED MING-PORCELAIN IN EUROPE: A GIFT OF CHINESE PORCELAIN FROM FERDINANDO DE' MEDICI (1549-1609) TO THE DRESDEN COURT

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The collection of East Asian porcelain in Dresden owes its existence to Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (1670-1733). A great and insatiable collector, he had by 1727 amassed more than 24,000 pieces of Oriental porcelain to be displayed at the Japanese Palace, the world's most spectacular "Porcelain Palace".¹

In fact the most exquisite pieces of Chinese porcelain had first arrived in Dresden more than 100 years earlier.

In 1590, the Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici of Tuscany (1549-1609) gave sixteen pieces of Chinese porcelain as a gift to the Elector Christian I of Saxony (1560-1591). Eight of these are to be seen in the Dresden Porcelain Collection.² (fig. 1) and at least two, the famous phoenix-shaped wine-jug and the small crayfish-shaped vessel, are recorded in the 1579 inventory of the Medici collections. They, therefore, represent the earliest documented Ming porcelain in Europe. The porcelain gifts from the Medici are not only of great historical importance, they are also marvellous pieces of porcelain, all different and each of great individual beauty.

These pieces of Chinese porcelain were of course not the first to appear in Europe. A very early "German" example is the famous Chinese celadon-bowl, a Longquan piece (10th–14th century), which was mounted in typical Gothic style in the Rhineland c.1435. It is now in the Treasury (the Schatzkammer) in Kassel, Germany.³ It belonged to Duke Philipp von Katzenelnbogen, who went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (1433–1434) and bought this bowl in Akka, the town situated at the Mediterranean end of the trade route from China via Baghdad and Damascus.⁴

In the 15th and 16th century Chinese porcelain was collected throughout the Near East, Persia, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. Important collections were formed in the Ardebil-Shrine by Shah Abbas in Persia⁵ and by the Ottoman rulers in the Topkapi Serail in Istanbul.⁶ From these countries Chinese porcelain was traded all over Europe, especially to Italy, as Italian merchants had long plied a vigorous trade with Egypt, Syria and Turkey.

Depictions of Chinese porcelain in Italian painting show how highly it was valued. For example, it was considered precious enough to be presented as a gift by the Magi to the Christ Child and for the gods and goddesses of antiquity to feast from.

Andrea Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi*, painted 1497-1500, shows the first wise man offering a blue and white cup full of pieces of gold. The cup is of a rather unorthodox shape, but its decoration would do for a contemporary Chinese piece.

The famous *Feast of the Gods* by Giovanni Bellini, in the National Gallery Washington, is dated 1514. It was painted originally either for Isabella d'Este or for Alfonso d'Este. The scene is based on a passage in Ovid, and may commemorate the marriage of Alfonso to Lucrezia Borgia. The gods are shown feasting and dining from Chinese porcelain, with the three blue and white bowls depicted bearing the scrolling decoration typical of 15th century Chinese porcelain.

It would not have been difficult for Bellini to have seen Chinese porcelain. Porcelain could easily have reached Venice as a gift from the Sultan of Cairo to the Doges and other prominent figures between about 1442 and 1503. In 1461 the Doge Pasquale Malipiero of Venice received twenty pieces of porcelain as a gift



Figure 1, The Medici-gift
From left: Two *kinrande* bowls, crayfish-shaped vessel, phoenix-shaped ewer, two blue-and-white bowls, lamp with Guixing on a boat, blue-and-white bowl with cover.
State Art Collections Dresden, Porcelain Collection

from the Egyptian Sultan Abulfer Hamer and, in 1490, porcelain was received by the Doge Agostino Barbarigo. As both he and his successor Loredano were painted by Bellini, the artist certainly must have had access to the Palace.⁷

It was not only the gods who dined from Chinese porcelain. According to Vespasiano da Bisticci's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, written between 1482 and 1498, a 15th century Florentine scholar, Nicolao Nicoli, was so cultured that he ate "from the most beautiful antique vessels, and in like manner the whole of his table was covered with vessels of porcelain."⁸

The Medici were the earliest collectors of Chinese porcelain in Europe.⁹ Fifty-one pieces of porcelain were recorded in the collection of Lorenzo il Magnifico (1449-1492), including pieces sent as diplomatic gifts, for example, some 20 pieces given by the Egyptian Sultan to Lorenzo¹⁰ in 1487.

In the 16th century, Cosimo I (1519-1574) and his son Francesco I (1541-1587) excelled as art collectors and collectors of porcelain. In 1553, the inventory of Cosimo's collections featured more than 400 pieces of *porcellana*, of the blue and white and the green celadon type.¹¹

Cardinale di Medici, Francesco I, collected porcelain in Rome. An alchemist with a wide interest in the arts, he is regarded as the inventor of Medici porcelain along with Bernardo Buontalenti (1536-1608).¹² It is difficult to know from the 1571 inventory, in which 163 pieces are recorded, if those referred to as *porcellana* were majolica, Islamic ceramics, Medici porcelain, or, on the other hand, Chinese.¹³ For example, the inventory reads, *un vaso grande di porcellana, venuto de l'India...* It could be Chinese, but, unfortunately, we do not know for sure because the descriptions are too vague.

Cardinale Ferdinando (1549-1609), a son of Cosimo I, was the greatest collector of his time. His collections of Greek and Roman sculptures, bronzes and paintings were housed in the Villa Medici in Rome and are the prototype for the opulence and splendour of Renaissance collecting.¹⁴

Ferdinando was a passionate collector of porcelain. Again we do not know if the *porcellana* mentioned in the inventories and lists was majolica, Islamic or Chinese but it seems that there were numerous pieces of Chinese, because in October 1571 the Cardinal gave 80 pieces of *porcellana de l'Indie* (probably Chinese porcelain) to his sister Isabella, Duchess of Bracciano. In 1587 Ferdinando became Grandduke of Tuscany and moved his collections from Rome to Florence, where they were housed in the Palazzo Pitti.

His collection of Chinese porcelain seems to have grown to more than 500 pieces by 1590, when (on the

26th February) Cardinale Ferdinando gave 14 pieces of Chinese porcelain to Christian I of Saxony.

The Saxon electors of the 16th century aimed to turn Dresden into a princely city and to establish themselves as rulers of European importance. This meant modernisation, particularly in the cultural field, and modernisation meant Italianisation.¹⁵

Towards the middle of the century the Elector Moritz (1521-1553) went on a journey to Italy and had his portrait painted by Titian in 1547. His successor, Elector Augustus (1526-1586), created even closer links with Italy and after his death in 1586 Christian I became the Elector, but ruled only until 1591.

All these Saxon electors made great efforts to attract Italian artists, architects, craftsmen, engineers and musicians across the Alps to Dresden¹⁶ and there was a steady migration of artists from Florence especially. The aristocratic architect Rocco di Linar, who came from Tuscany and was educated with Cosimo Medici, worked in Dresden and went on diplomatic missions to Florence, Ferrara and Mantua in 1572. On his return he brought gifts for the Elector Augustus, which initiated an exchange of presents between the two courts.

For their part, the Medici sought good relationships with those German princes who could provide them with skilled mining and artillery specialists. In 1587, the Medici sent three works by the great sculptor Giovanni da Bologna (1529-1608) to the Dresden court. One, his famous figure of Mercury (messenger of the gods), is still one of the artistic highlights of the Green Vault in Dresden.

Christian I loved everything Italian. He studied the language and Italian etiquette with the architect Carlo Theti, who served as Saxon envoy to Florence in 1585. He was particularly fascinated by the sophisticated Italian equestrian technique and in 1587 sent envoys to Italy to bring back Italian horses. An inventory of 1595 confirms his enthusiasm for such matters, recording many hippological works in both Italian and French. Inspired by Florentine architecture he built the most magnificent stables of the day in the castle at Dresden for his 128 horses

As an art collector Christian's ambition was to enlarge the *Kunstammer* to make it of European importance, and he was assisted in his ambition when, in 1590, a gift of Chinese porcelain arrived at the Dresden court from the Medici. This was the very first real porcelain to appear in Dresden.

There is a *registro dei doni* (register of gifts), which

was kept at the Medici court in Florence by the *maestro di casa* Giovanni del Maestro.¹⁷ He packed three boxes for the Dresden court: one with items made of gold and silver and paintings - it would be interesting to see what the description *quadro di piture de l'Indie a figure e paesi* (four paintings from India with figures and landscapes)¹⁸ actually meant, or, alternatively, what a box *schatolina tonda della Cina, de l'Indie* (a small, round Chinese box from India) looked like. It seems, that "from India" in this context and period just means "from the Far East", meaning "exotic" as in English "Indian style" and in German "Indianisch".

In addition, the *maestro di casa* added – and inventoried – an extra box containing classic Italian gourmet food. We read in the register about *cacio Parmigiano*, *olio dolce*, different kinds of *prosciutto*, *salami di Firenze* and *salami di Lombardio*, rare delicacies like *un barile d'òche salate* (salted geese). To wash all this down there was good wine, numerous bottles of *Greco di 48 anni*, *Vino Falangino di Sicilia* or *Trebbiano di Pesca...*¹⁹

The register of the box with gifts of porcelain includes 14 pieces. Most of the Chinese porcelains are not specifically referred to, the register just says something like *una schodella di porcelana* (one porcelain bowl). But, some of the porcelain mentioned in the 1779 Medici inventory can be identified from the packing list. There is the *bochale di porcelana de l'Indie a moda di dragho, dorato e dipinto* (a porcelain jug in the shape of a dragon, with gold and colours added), which can be identified as the phoenix ewer. The inventory of the Roman *guarderoba* of Ferdinando has *dua boccali o mescirobo di porcellana a modo di drago, e una a modo di cocodrillo*.²⁰ It seems that originally there were two phoenix-shaped vessels. The *cocodrillo*-shaped vessel refers to the crayfish-ewer. The *Lucernina di porcelana dorata et dipin, de l'Indie* (a small porcelain lamp, with gold and colours) relates to the small lantern.

Fortunately, the Saxon registrar was more precise. However, while he mentions 16 pieces of porcelain, he did not realise that the porcelain which came from Italy was Chinese.

The inventory describes the entire gift as *Ahn Italianischenn Trinck und anderen Geschirren welche anno 1590 von dem Hertzogenn von Florenz vorehrte worden* (Italian drinking vessels and other vessels, which were given in the year 1590 by the Duke of Florence). The 1595 inventory, in which the individual numbers are listed, is preserved in the archives of the *Kunstammer*, the Green Vault, in Dresden.²¹ (fig. 2, 3)

Thanks to the rich material preserved in the archives



Figure 2, Cover of the inventory of the Dresden Kunstammer, 1595
Archive of the Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden

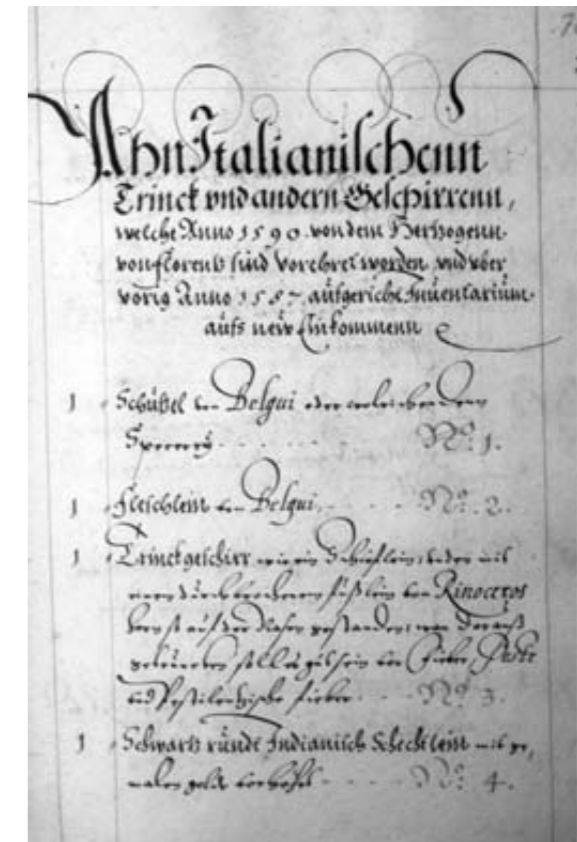


Figure 3, List of the Medici-gift from the inventory of the Dresden Kunstammer 1595
Archive of Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden

of the Dresden museums it is possible to reconstruct the "biographies" of our Chinese porcelain, listed for the first time in 1590, in the subsequent inventories of 1610, 1619, 1640, 1732 and 1741.²² During this time these porcelains all belonged to the *Kunstammer*. The porcelain from the Medici-gift only entered the Porcelain Collection in 1823.

The most spectacular piece is the phoenix-shaped ewer or carafe.²³ European ignorance of Far Eastern mythological animals led them to mistake the phoenix for a dragon. Thus, in the 1595 inventory, we read of the *Dresden Kunstammer: 1 Pocal von Porcellana wie ein Drache, verguldet, auch grün und blau geferbet* (one porcelain jug like a dragon, with gold, the colours green and blue). For reasons connected with the technicalities of firing, the legs of the bird rest on a plinth moulded with a relief evoking rocks and clouds. Its beak serves as a spout and the handle is in the form of a branch. The colours of the *email sur biscuit* are bright

green, turquoise and aubergine for the feathers and clouds with which the phoenix is surrounded.

The head and breast of the bird are painted yellow, with traces of gold. It seems from the description in the old inventory that the yellow enamel was entirely covered with gold. There are no traces of gold on the "green and blue" enamelled parts of the bird. It seems that there is only one comparable *fenghui* phoenix-carafe in public collections in the Taft-Museum, Cincinnati.²⁴

Normally one does not especially emphasise restoration on porcelain, but the phoenix-carafe has a very special repair on the neck of the bird. (fig. 4) It is documented that the damage occurred between 1590 and some time after 1619. The entry for the carafe in the *Dresden Kunstammer* inventory of 1619 reads: *1 Pocal von Porcellana wie ein Drache Verguldet, auch grün und blau geferbett*. (one jug made of porcelain like a dragon, with gold, and colours green and blue). Added



Figure 4, Detail of the phoenix-shaped ewer

in another hand, but from the style of writing written somewhat later, the remark *ist zerbrochen und geleimet* (broken and glued), making it a truly historical work of repair.

The little crayfish-vessel is only about 12 cm high.²⁵ The crayfish is perched on a *lotus pod* and a *brown lotus leaf*. There is a place on its back where the vessel can be filled, in the form of a small flower enamelled in bright turquoise. It is decorated in yellow, green, brown and turquoise. Again the yellow-glazed parts show traces of gold-leaf. (fig. 5)

In the description of the Medici-collection for 1579 it says: *Un peparola di porcellana a moda di gambero, dorato* (a vessel for pepper made of porcelain in the shape of a crayfish, with gold).²⁶ The term *peparola*, which means something like a small pepper-pot, seems quite surprising, as in a Chinese context the vessel would have been used as a kind of water dropper. Obviously though the Medici put pepper – at that time an exotic and expensive commodity - into the opening

on the back and poured it through the crayfish's mouth. This is not so surprising, because, as we know, the Medici kept porcelain not only as collectors' items or for display, but actually used it at table *per uso di tavola*.²⁷

In 1579 this small vessel was included in the Dresden inventory as *I Pocal von Porcellana verguldet blau und rot farben fast eines Krebsen gestaltdt* (one porcelain goblet with gold, blue and red, almost the shape of a crayfish).

However, in the Dresden collection, there is another crayfish-vessel, of a modified shape.²⁸ (fig. 6) It is shown sitting on an inverted lotus leaf, the stalk of which forms a spout. On its back is a lotus-pod opening with a flat lid surmounted by a frog, and a stalk comprising the handle. The surface below is moulded with a design of breaking waves, a leaping carp on either side, and a crab below the handle. The recessed, oval base is unglazed. It is coated with washes of coloured glaze, a leaf-green and an aubergine, and a typical Ming turquoise. The body is glazed yellow and has been gilt. The white crests on the green waves are coated with a thin, lustrous and almost colourless wash, which does duty for white in the biscuit colour scheme.

Figure 5, Detail of the crayfish-shaped vessel



This vessel was not part of the Dresden *Kunstammer*, but of the porcelain collection of Augustus the Strong, and featured in the 1721 inventory as *Eine Thee-Kanne in Form eines grünen und Verguldeten Krebses, mit einem gelben Deckel, worauff ein braunes Fröschgen. Die*



Figure 6, Crayfish-shaped ewer
State Art Collections Dresden, Porcelain Collection

Kanne ist mit verguldetem Messing beschlagen. (Teapot in the shape of a green and gilt crayfish, with a yellow lid, on which is sitting a small frog. The pot is mounted with gilt brass.) There are no remains of the mounting mentioned in the inventory.

This type of a crayfish vessel seems to be more common, because there are several of them in other European public collections.²⁹

A crayfish very similar to the Dresden piece and still surviving relates to a famous *Kunstammer*-collection, being part of a so-called Hainhofer *Kunstschränk*, Hainhofer cabinet.³⁰ Philipp Hainhofer (1578-1647) was the inventor of these special cabinets, in which porcelain was kept and displayed. He was a man of remarkable talent and activities and provides a link between *Kunstammer*-collecting, the Medici, Dresden, and the Chinese crayfish vessel. Hainhofer was a wealthy trader in luxury goods from Augsburg, Germany, and had business contacts all over Europe. He mainly collected

conchylia and ethnographica. His *Kunstammer* in Augsburg became very famous and attracted many distinguished visitors including various German princes, the King of Denmark, Archduke Leopold from Austria, Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, various Medici princes and travelling English aristocrats. Among the latter was the most distinguished English collector of the time, Thomas Howard, second Earl of Arundel, of whom Hainhofer proudly reports, that he “*came to see my curiosities*”.

Hainhofer's truly original achievement lies in his pieces of multi-purpose furniture, his great cabinets, intended to be miniature *Kunstammern*. He had them custom-made by Augsburg artisans and tried to sell them to kings, princes and dukes. In Italy they were usually called *stipeo tedesco*, and it was a Hainhofer cabinet in which the Medici kept their porcelain at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

The cabinet containing the little crayfish-vessel was given to the Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus. This cabinet has a story too. When Swedish troops entered Augsburg in 1632, the Lutheran councillors wanted to welcome the protestant King with a spectacular gift. They bought the cabinet from Hainhofer and presented it to him. In 1694 it was given to the University of Uppsala, where it now stands in the most splendid room of the University building.

Many of these objects have survived, including some of the porcelain, and the most spectacular and interesting piece is a vessel shaped as a crayfish, which is very similar to the example in Dresden.

Hainhofer visited numerous great princely collections of his time. In 1628, for example, he visited the Treasury of Archduke Ferdinand II at Ambras, near Innsbruck, and the Dresden *Kunstammer*.

In his travel reports we read his enthusiastic descriptions of the Dresden *Kunstammer* and find – in the first room, the *i gemach*, the Medici porcelain gifts: *vielerley schöne Porcellana, wie trinckgeschirr, schalen und mancherley thierlein gemacht* (numerous fine porcelains, vessels for drinking, bowls, shaped as little animals).³¹

The porcelain from the Medici gift was displayed in the Dresden *Kunstammer* in a remarkable cabinet which has unfortunately been lost. There is a description in a 1732 inventory which says that the precious porcelain was kept in *Ein Kästlein von Indianischen Lagck Werck darauff stehet. Ein Indianisch Tresor von Holtz mit Lagckwerck und Golde gezieret haben die Hertzoge von Weymar ꝑ. Churfürst Joh. Georgen dem Ersten, zu Sachßen, zum Neüen Jahre ao: 1616. verehren lassen.* (A



Figure 7, Small "lamp" in the shape of Guixing standing on a boat

box made of Indian lacquer, placed on a wooden stand. The *tesor* was decorated with lacquer and gold and was given at New Year 1616 to Johann Georg I, Elector of Saxony, by the Duke of Weimar).

Ewers in bizarre shapes like that of a phoenix, or a crayfish, were not only collectors' items in princely collections in Europe. It seems that they were originally made in Southern China, probably in the province of Fujian, for the South-East Asian market. Like many Ming ceramics they were preserved there over the centuries and used and appreciated as ritual objects.

As late as the end of Second World War in 1945 crayfish ewers, almost identical to those in the European *Kunstammern* of the 16th century, were used among the Kelabits and Muruts people of the uplands in the interior of Sarawak and Kalimantan for rice wine, *borak*, in ceremonies associated with fertility and head hunting. These crayfish vessels used in Indonesia are now in the Museum in Sarawak.³²

The third piece of biscuit porcelain is a very small

figure of the Chinese God of literature, Guixing, shown standing in a boat.³³ (fig. 7) This vessel is recorded in the Medici inventories of 1579 as *Lucernina di porcellana dorata et dipinta, de l'Indie* (a small porcelain lamp with gold and painted, from India). In the 1595 Dresden inventory we find: *Lucerna, oder Lampe von Porcellana verguldet obenauf mit einer stehenden Figur geziret* (a small lamp made of porcelain, with gold and painted, decorated with a standing figure on top).

This bizarre figure is Guixing but why is he so ugly and bizarre? This Daoist deity, said to have lived as a man during the Tang Dynasty, was finally deified in the 14th century. He is generally represented as Wenchang, a handsome man in a sitting position, or as the extremely ugly star-god Guixing, with two long crooked hornlike projections growing from his head. He sometimes stands with one foot on the head of a large fish - the fish, or carp, of the Yellow River is believed to make an ascent of the stream every year, and those which succeed in passing the rapids at Longmen change into dragons - a symbol of success in the imperial examinations.



Figure 8, Bowl painted with ships

On the small lamp the element of water is suggested by waves and little aquatic flowers moulded around the foot and there are traces of gilding. No comparable piece is known in any other public collection.

Of the blue and white porcelain, three pieces of the Medici-porcelain gift to the Dresden court are still in the Porcelain Collection.

A small lidded bowl is painted with fish and water plants, the lid with stylised flowers, the knob shaped as a little lion.³⁴ Inside the bowl we find two characters *gu yu* - a reference to old jade and the appreciation of it by the Chinese. The vessel can be dated into the Jiajing-period (1522-66). This bowl cannot be identified in the Italian inventories, because they are not detailed enough. But it is referred to in the old Dresden inventory as *Schüßell mit degkell gemalet mit fischen, obenauf mit einem tierlein*. (Bowl with lid painted with fish, on top a little animal).

The second blue and white porcelain is a charming bowl painted with a pair of ducks in a riverside landscape.³⁵ The bowl is probably No. 15 on the list: *Eine Schußell von Porcellana, inwendig weis, und auswendig blau gemalt* (one porcelain bowl, inside white, outside painted blue.)

The high bowl which, in the list of the gifts of Ferdinando de' Medici is referred as *una scoldella di porcellana alta*, appears in the Dresden inventory as *I Schüssel von Porcellana hoch, gemalet mit blettern und wie ein Schiffllein blau gezieret*. (A high porcelain bowl, painted in blue with leaves and a small ship.)³⁶ (fig. 8) The *bletter* -leaves- refer presumably to the water plants on the trimming of the inner rim.

The bowl has a beautiful calyx-like shape. On the

outside surface it shows a river landscape with high mountains, pagodas and high building. On one side there is a boat containing a gentleman, while, on the opposite side, the sails of a large sailing ship with two masts are being hoisted by the crew. Sailors are sitting in the crow's nest. There are high wooden structures in the bow and stern on which sailors are standing. The inside of the bowl is decorated with a rim of herons and water plants, the *bletter* and the bottom with a small sailing boat among lotus blossoms. The decoration, freely executed in different shades of dark cobalt blue, is characteristic of the Jiajing period.

There are comparable pieces are in the collection of the Topkapi Serail Museum, Istanbul.³⁷

Two more bowls must also be mentioned. They were also made in China in the Jiajing era and are called *kinrande*, after the Japanese for "gold brocade style" because the décor refers to a textile woven with gold thread. One of the Dresden *kinrande* bowls has a coral red exterior and the other a green glazed exterior and both are ornamented in gold with lotus-blossoms and tendrils. Unfortunately much of the gold has disappeared.³⁸ (fig. 7) Splendid *kinrande* bowls were very much appreciated in Japan and used in the tea ceremony. By 1616, there were hundreds of *kinrande*-pieces of various shapes and designs in the inventories of the collections of Japan's shoguns. They were probably for practical use in the tea-ceremony. The splendid *kinrande* was not only fashionable in Japan; shards from them have been found in Fostat, Cairo, and in remote Spanish outposts in Peru and New Mexico.

It seems that because of the gilding they were very much sought after in Europe and hence are found in several old collections. There are many *kinrande*-pieces in the *Kunstammer* Collection at Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck, Austria. A 1596 inventory of the Ambras collection, thus made a little later than the Dresden inventory, records numerous bowls decorated (*geschmelzt*) with gold or blue and white (*plau und weisz*).³⁹ Some of the *kinrande* bowls found in European collections were mounted with 16th century German mounts.⁴⁰ Most are marked on the base with the characters *wan fu you tong* (May ten thousand blessings gather together).

In 1589 the Medici recorded *I schodella bianca dipinta d'oro e verde* (1 porcelain bowl painted with gold and green), while in the 1595 Dresden *Kunstammer* inventory it is referred to as *I Schussel von Porcellana außwendige mit grün und guldenen bemaleten Blettern und*



Figure 9, Melon-shaped jar, Annamese, 15th century
State Art Collections Dresden, Porcelain Collection

inwendige blau (1 porcelain bowl inside blue, on the outside painted with green and golden leaves.) The coral-red of the second bowl is referred as *leibfarbig* (body-colour).

The Dresden porcelain collection includes a huge 15th century blue-and white melon-shaped globular jar from Vietnam or Annam. (fig.9) According to Reide-meister this jar was also part of the aforementioned Medici gift.⁴¹ He relates it to the entry in the Dresden inventory *I Achteckigte Schussel von Porcellana inwendige mit blauen und auswendige weißen Laubwergk gemalet.* (An octagonal porcelain bowl on the inside painted with white and on the outside with blue leaves).

However, the jar has twelve rather than eight panels. Each is decorated with alternating stylised lotus flowers and scrolls and so called *baoxiang* flowers or “precious image flowers” (a kind of stylised lotus flower with the features of peonies, such as in the shape of the leaves). This kind of flower first appears in Chinese art during the Tang dynasty, and we find it on

several of the good pieces of Annamese blue and white porcelain. Generally the decoration derives from Chinese Jingdezhen models, but is different in major respects. The melon-shape also looks very Vietnamese and owes nothing to Chinese influence.⁴²

The most important documented piece from this group is the huge jar in the Topkapi Serail museum collection, which is inscribed and dated 1450. The Vietnamese inscription in Chinese characters (to be read from left to the right – unlike in Chinese) – says: “*painted for pleasure by the craftswoman Bui of Nam-zi-zhou in the eighth year of Thai-hoa*” (chin. *Da he* Great harmony). *Nan zi zhou* is Annam, and *Tai Hoa* reigned in Annam from 1443-1454, so this group can be dated around 1450.⁴³

The manufacture of blue and white porcelain in Annam was highly developed in the 15th century and Annamese wares were exported in large numbers to Southeast Asia, but not generally to the West. Again we find the phenomenon that wares like the animal-shaped ewers mentioned above were exported to Southeast Asia, or to the princely *Kunstammer* in the West.

It will take more research to relate the melon-shaped Annamese jar in the Dresden collection with certainty to the Medici gift.

Looking at the group of porcelain again we wonder what was so attractive and so fascinating about these pieces at that time? It was of course their rarity and in the case of the figures and the *kinrande* bowls it was the bright colours and the generous use of gold. It is remarkable that the gilding is always mentioned in the old inventories.

The fine, splendid Chinese blue and white Ming porcelain appeared to combine the characteristics of pottery, the tin-glazed painted earthenware majolica, and glass.

The enormous appreciation of the group of Chinese porcelain by the Medici in 1590 is reflected in the fact that it was regarded as ideal *Kunstammer* “treasure”, has been well documented over the centuries and is remain intact, remaining one of the important highlights of the Dresden Porcelain Collection.

Acknowledgements

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NOTES

1. For a selection of Oriental masterpieces from the Dresden collection see Eva Ströber, “*La maladie de porcelaine...*” *Ostasiatisches Porzellan aus der Sammlung Augusts des Starken/ East Asian Porcelain from the Collection of Augustus the Strong*, Leipzig 2001
2. The first to identify the pieces was Leopold Reidemeister. *Eine Schenkung chinesischer Porzellane aus dem Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*. In: *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift, Neue Folge IX* (1933), Heft 1, S. 11-16 See also Friedrich Reichel: *Porzellane der frühen Ming-Zeit in der Dresdner Porzellansammlung*. In: *Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Jahrbuch 1965/66*, S. 115-121. For a summary of the Italian sources see Marco Spallanzani, *Le porcellane Cinesi donate a Cristiano di Sassonia da Ferdinando I de' Medici*. In: *Faenza 65* (1979), p. 382-389.
3. For a discussion of this piece see Ulrich Schmidt (ed.), *Porzellan aus China und Japan. Die Porzellangalerie der Landgrafen von Hessen-Kassel*. Berlin 1990, p. 11-13.
4. For the trade routes of Chinese porcelain see: John Carswell, *Blue & White. Chinese porcelain around the world*. London 2000.
5. See John A. Pope, *Chinese porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, Washington 1956
6. See Regina Krahl and John Ayers. *Chinese ceramics in the Topkapi Serail Museum, Istanbul*, 3 vols. London 1986
7. See Marco Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence 1978, p. 195-196

8. For the earliest oriental porcelain in Italy and the impact on Medici porcelain see Arthur Lane, *Italian Porcelain*, London 1954, p. 1-7.
9. For the collecting of Chinese porcelain in Renaissance Italy see Marco Spallanzani, *Ceramiche Orientalia a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence 1978
10. For the 1492 inventory of *porcellana* of Lorenzo il Magnifico see Spallanzani 1978, *Ceramiche Orientalia...*, fig. 6, and document No.37, p. 178-179
11. See Spallanzani 1978, *Ceramiche Orientalia...* p. 64-68 and document No. 60, p. 189-191.
12. For the invention of Medici porcelain see Galeazzo Cora and Angiolo Fanfani, *La porcellana deo Medici*, Milano 1986
13. For a discussion of the term *porcellana* see Spallanzani 1978, *Ceramiche Orientalia...*, p. 37-41
14. See the exhibition catalogue by Michel Hochmann (ed.) *Villa Medici. Il sogno di un cardinale. Collezioni e artisti di Ferdinando de Medici*. Rome 1999.
15. A comprehensive analysis of Dresden court culture in the 16th and 17th century is given by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Court Culture in Dresden. From Renaissance to 33*. H: 9,5 cm, Inv. No. P.O. 3791
34. H: 11,5 cm; Inv. No. P.O. 3227
35. H: 6,7 cm, Inv. No. P.O. 3225
36. H: 10,5 cm, Inv. No. P.O. 3226
37. See Krahl and Ayers (ed.), 1986, *Chinese ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum...* Vol II, No. 1081-1091, p.676-678
38. H: 6,5 cm resp., red bowl: Inv. No. P.O. 3229; green bowl Inv. No. P.O. 3228
39. For the Ambras *Kunstammer* see Fritz Fichtner, *Ming-Porzellane in der Kunstammer Ferdinand II. von Tirol*. In: *Keramische Zeitschrift*, 10. Jahrgang, Nr. 8 (1951), S. 432-440. For the results of more recent research see Wilfried Seipel (ed.), *Exotica. Portugals Entdeckungen im Spiegel fürstlicher Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Renaissance*. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, 2000, Kat. No 208-214, S. 279-282.
40. For the bowl with *kinrande* on blue in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, fitted with a German mount datable to 1590-1610, see Suzanne G. Valenstein, *A Handbook of Chinese Ceramics*. New York 1989, fig. 174, p. 178. For the red *kinrande* bowl in the Victoria & Albert Museum London, supposed to be brought from Turkey by Eberhardt von Manderscheidt to Germany in 1583 and mounted there on a silver pedestal, see Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, *Ming Porcelain*, London 1978, fig. 174. For the green mounted bowl in the British Museum London which is said to have come from a castle of the Grand Duke of Baden, Germany, the silver-gilt mounts Germany, second half of the 16th century, see Jessica Harrison-Hall 2001, No. 9:66, p. 245-246
41. See Reidemeister 1933, *Eine Schenkung chinesischer Porzellane...*
42. A very similar piece in the collection of Walter Sedgwick is reproduced in Sir Harry Garner, *Oriental Blue & White*