

DUTCH DELFTWARE 1620-1670¹

J.D. Van Dam

Keeper of Ceramics, Department of Sculpture and Decorative Art, Rijksmuseum



Figure 1. Delftware plate, painted in blue, Delft, c.1630-45. Diameter: 18.9 cm. Private collection

THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS, A COMPARATIVELY small confederation on the North Sea, enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity as a republic in the 17th century. The country's achievements, both the economic ones and their cultural concomitants, can only be compared in post-medieval history with those of Italy in the 15th and 16th centuries and England in the 18th and 19th.

At such a time not only did the arts blossom, but a series of new ideas and technical innovations ensured a powerful flowering of the production of useful and decorative objects. Ceramics, those fragile yet imper-

ishable materials, constituted in the three above-mentioned countries an unbroken continuum in a continually changing mass product from c.1450 to c.1850. The recurring exceptional achievements in this area were amongst the pinnacles of applied art of the period.

Delft faïence, from the small town of that name, forms the link, both historically and artistically, between Italian maiolica and 18th-century European



Figure 2. Delftware altar vase, painted in blue with chinoiserie, Delft, attributed to De Porceleynen Schotel factory, dated 1626. Height: 8.2 cm. Private collection

Northern Netherlands until 1600. Soon after towns like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Delft (1584) followed. After 1600 there was a tendency to establish potteries in smaller towns in the western part of the Netherlands to serve the local population. By then the normal production pattern was already being followed in maiolica. That is to say, it was originally aimed at the upper levels of society, but as it gradually improved in sophistication the production was subdivided into various price ranges and quality. The finest was for the consumption of the upper classes, a less expensive range for the middle classes and the cheapest and simplest for the lower levels of society who were not entirely devoid of purchasing power, in the countryside of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland.

Between 1600 and 1620 the luxury ceramic industry in the Netherlands suffered a severe setback due to the import of Chinese porcelain which was far more refined than the existing maiolica product, even at its best. How quickly this Chinese import started to threaten the local industry may be seen from the following figures: 1610: about 9000 items were imported; 1612: about 40,000 and 1614: 70,000!³ The importance of these figures is put into perspective when we consider that the total population of the Netherlands was less than 2 million, half of which lived in the western provinces. Realistically the potential market comprised 15% of the population in the most prosperous part of the country with no more than 10% for the rest and under 200,000 people forming the buyers market!

By 1630 imported porcelain had risen to well above 200,000 items a year. Clearly the Dutch maiolica industry anticipated difficult times ahead. The quality of the imported porcelain was infinitely superior but more costly, appealing to the nouveau riche. During this period, the competitive struggle regarding quality between maiolica and Chinese porcelain was significant and both the maiolica and tile industries suffered. A number of maiolica factories went into liquidation and another group began to concentrate on the tile industry, a branch that was not threatened by imports. Other manufacturers concentrated on cheaper products in which the earthenware was coarser and decorations less refined. The main incentive was to target a different section of the market, the middle classes, who after 1630 comprised the richer Dutch peasantry in the rural areas, plus the Republic's important export areas in Northern Germany, Flanders, the north and west coast of France down to Bordeaux and probably

Until 1620 the maiolica technique was the only one used in the Netherlands. During this period of maiolica production (c. 1560-1600), the output of the potteries consisted of jugs, cans, apothecary pots and dishes of differing diameters. Floor and wall tiles also formed a considerable part of the total production. The town of Haarlem was undoubtedly the first and most important site of this industry in the



Figure 3. Delftware jug with silver lid, painted in blue with chinoiserie in Ming style, Delft, attributed to De Porceleynen Schotel factory, c. 1630-1650. Height: 26 cm. Princeshof Museum Leeuwarden

section of the market. Eventually, this proved to be an excellent solution and a unique position in the European market was established. Chinese porcelain was characterized by a very thin and intensely white potsherd and a smooth surface and many technical problems had to be overcome to achieve a comparable maiolica product. For example a thinner dish resulted in an increased danger of warping. Also, the change from lead glazing on the back to tin glazing was followed by a complete deterioration of the glaze. The new product was characterized by an improved clay mixture, a thin sherd and intense white tin glazing on both sides. To improve the composition of the body, marl from Tournai in Belgium or Norwich in East Anglia was added to the clay mixture. The firing process took place in closed saggars on pegs. Consequently there was an absence of spurmarks from the trivets on the face and the improved firing technique meant that the volatile compounds in the glaze could not escape. This improved product was to be known as faïence or delftware, but in seventeenth century Holland they called it Hollants Porceleyn (Dutch Porcelain).

Most of the research designed to improve the quality of delftware was performed in the years between 1618 and 1624 and may be described as an experimental period. The work was done at the factory in Delft, which was later named *De Porceleynen Schotel* (The Porcelain Dish). Key names in this development are Elisabeth Cornelisdaughter Suycker and her second husband (after 1630), Hendrick Marcelisz van Gogh. They were the owners of *De Porceleynen Schotel* factory. Another name that should be mentioned is that of Cornelis Harmansz Valckenhoven from another Delft factory called *De Porceleynen Lampetkan* (The Porcelain Ewer). Possibly the most important person in this respect was the technical manager of *De Porceleynen Schotel*: Willem Jansz. Verstraeten. He left this Delft factory in 1625 to start his own delftware pottery in Haarlem.

As a rule, no attempt was made to imitate decorations in Chinese style, instead typically Dutch ornamental designs surrounded landscapes, biblical scenes etc. (fig. 1). Only those objects not available in China, like jugs, salt cellars, mustard jugs and altar vases were decorated in the Chinese style (figs. 2, 3). One characteristic for all products in the Netherlands should be mentioned specifically. All plates and dishes made before c.1620 have a continuous profile on the back originating from Italian maiolica or perhaps from Northern European bowls made of

England, with whom the Republic always maintained intensive economic and cultural contacts. The coarse but boldly painted dishes in question constituted a separate group in the period up to 1675, the decoration often being related to that on tiles. A small group of factories in Delft, and in particular in the province of Friesland, continued to make these dishes, which became even cruder and more primitively painted for the lower echelons. By 1870 these exclusively Frisian maiolica dishes were appearing on the tables of the impoverished peasants of the poor sandy soils of the eastern part of the country.

An alternative approach for the maiolica potters was to refine production so that the quality of imported Chinese porcelain could be matched as closely as possible in order to compete with this

turned wood. After 1620-1625 all plates and dishes, made either in each category of maiolica or in refined delftware, show a pronounced crease at the back (a real step). In this the potters were imitating the shape of the very new imported Chinese 'kraak' porcelain. In the 1650s other shapes held sway, such as bowl forms and scalloped dishes derived from metal examples.

Several English collections have dated objects, inscribed with English names, very much like the group of objects shown here (figs. 2, 3), attributed to *De Porceleynen Schotel* factory of Elisabeth and Hendrick Marcelisz van Gogh. For that reason the complete group was once published as English⁴, presumably made in London by the pottery near Pickleherring Quay, Southwark, owned by Christian Wilhelm, a Dutchman by birth. The examples with English names are without any doubt English but most of the others must be Dutch. The fragment (fig. 2) of a small altar vase, dated 1626, was found in Delft, and several other items were found, broken and thrown away, in the Netherlands. The use of these jugs in Dutch still lifes (fig. 4) and the Dutch silver mounts confirm this attribution.⁵ Could it be that Christian Lowest, one of the more important employees in Wilhelm's Pickleherring pottery⁶, who came from the Northern Netherlands to Southwark, is the same person as Corstiaen Louwis, who married at the end of October 1620 in Delft⁷, described as *plateelbakker*? Could it be that he brought the different technique of delftware firing to England? Perhaps it was they who also instigated the ban on the export of 'English earth' (*Engelsche Aerde*), i.e. marl from Norwich, which was imposed in 1624 by James I of England because he had been informed that this raw material was used in the cloth industry. The workers at the Pickleherring Quay Pottery must have been well aware of the importance of this indispensable component.

For exact dating we should remember that the three large producers mentioned had to adapt their products to the East India Company's order in China (1635-1637) for porcelain after European models. Most objects of this group with Chinese decorations can be dated between 1620 and 1640 for that reason.

How expensive these goods were we learn from a receipt which Hendrick Marcelisz van Gogh of *De Porceleynen Schotel* factory sent the Antwerp based art dealer Matthijs Musson in November 1644:

1 *Dosijn grote kannen van 30 st. kompt gl. 18*

2 " *kannen* " *20 st. t stuck kompt gl 24*
etc.

3 *Dosijn kantige booter schotels fijn 2 gl gl 6*
etc.

(one dozen large jugs of 30 st (1 st = 5 cents)



Figure 4. Jan Havicksz. Steen (1626-1679). Lady eating oysters - on the table a jug like fig.3. Mauritshuis Museum The Hague

together 18 guilders; two dozen jugs of 20 st together 24 guilders, etc. three dozen octagonal breakfast plates (diam 20 cm), the best, two guilders per dozen, together 6 guilders).

The total sum of the delivery was 282 guilders, 9 stuivers including 6 guilders for packaging (crate) and to get current values this must be multiplied by at least one hundred to one hundred and fifty, so the large jugs were in today's money £ 50,- to £ 75,- each.⁸

In 1647 history more or less repeats itself. Due to the civil war between the Ming emperors and the invading Manchus, export from China was diminished drastically. No more than half of the previous quota was available by 1647, after this the number was practically zero. In 1646 the amount of imported porcelain objects must have been around 300,000 pieces.

Obviously these events were of tremendous importance to the Dutch pottery industry. The three existing important factories in Delft and Haarlem with their 20 years' experience managed to expand with demand. One must understand that a large factory had a production capacity of around twenty to thirty thousand decorated items a year, so that the falling supply of Chinese porcelain offered scope for



Figure 5. Delftware dish, painted in blue. Delft, dated 1662.
Diameter: 40 cm. Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis
Brussels

around ten new potteries which did, indeed, swiftly materialise. In 1650, *De Porceleynen Schotel* factory had 50 employees and by 1660 about 25 potteries produced delftware of differing quality and price.

Seemingly there was no question of overproduction and some of the by then outdated maiolica still being produced in various towns in the province of Holland was driven out by the new 'Dutch Porcelain', while a number of factories in Delft simply produced plain or sketchily decorated faïence tableware. Furthermore, the enormous scale of the production as a whole made it possible to establish joint concerns for parts of the manufacturing process,

clay washing establishments and glaze mills for example. A very important part was played by wealthy outsiders, who were willing and able to invest large sums in a capital intensive industry which suddenly provided unprecedented opportunities. These entrepreneurs sometimes had simply a financial interest in a pottery, owning only a half or quarter share in it.

When the import of Chinese porcelain ceased, the demand for Chinese decorations grew rapidly. Excellent decorations in late Ming style as well as more simple items, often with only part of the motif like a flower or a bird, became available. The inventiveness in the better class potteries was such that refined decorations from Ming porcelain could be found there (fig. 5).

In this period (up to 1680), however, the produc-



Figure 6. Delftware dish, painted in blue, Delft, dated 1650.
Diameter: 37 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

tion of smaller plates and larger dishes with Dutch style decorations such as biblical and rural scenes, coats-of-arms and portraits of the Orange family was maintained (fig. 6).

Finally, a family history should be recounted as it contributed to the research for this study by giving a general view of the trade of the period. We met Willem Janszoon Verstraeten before, when he moved from Delft to Haarlem in 1625. In 1642 he fell ill and had to sell his business to his son, Gerrit Willemszoon. However, Willem recovered and decided to start a new firm. Father and son made a contract, dividing the market in such a way that the fashionable delftware was made by the son, and the father stuck to the old-fashioned maiolica. Gerrit, a clever businessman, managed in 1644 to sign an agreement with the two big delftware potteries in

Delft. With this agreement it was clear that the three still dominated the Dutch market. Three years later, when Chinese imports stopped, Willem Verstraeten realized that he, unfortunately, had made the wrong decision. The case went to court, and documents are still available giving an insight into production and trade in top class ceramics in the Netherlands around 1650.⁹ The final agreement was not advantageous for Willem Verstraeten who was forced to continue with maiolica production but was only allowed to make delftware with Dutch decorations. Today we are able to regard this decision as a blessing because the result was a remarkable group of dishes with refined biblical scenes which were produced in Haarlem (fig.



Figure 7. Delftware dish, painted in blue with Jesus and the adulterous woman, Haarlem, attributed to the factory of Willem Jansz Verstraeten, dated 1651. Diameter: 38 cm. Amsterdams Historisch Museum



Figure 8. Delftware dish, painted in yellow, orange-brown and shades of manganese and blue, Haarlem, attributed to the factory of Willem Jansz Verstraeten, c. 1650-1655. Diameter: 45 cm. Fries Museum Leeuwarden



Figure 9. Delftware possetpot, painted in blue, London, dated 1687. Height: 16 cm, Width: 26,5 cm (incl. handles). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, gift of the heirs of John F. Loudon.

7), also, an interesting set of dishes in a style blending *compendiario* with grotesques reminiscent of the Urbino-Patanazzi workshop (fig. 8).

Upon the death of Willem Verstraeten in 1655, followed by his son two years later, production of tin glazed pottery and tiles in Haarlem came to an end. Delft then had almost a monopoly in this field taking over the specialization from Verstraeten Senior. The old maiolica and tile industry in Rotterdam and Amsterdam specialized in tiles and around 1670 one can say that delftware was only made in Delft, tiles for the greater part in Rotterdam and Amsterdam and clay pipes in Gouda.

Although Europe was plagued by wars and unrest before 1650, a proportion of the imported Chinese porcelain was exported from Holland again. After about 1660 Germany in particular, which was gradually recovering from the consequences of the Thirty Years War, proved to be a willing market for delftware as a replacement for porcelain. In addition to fine tableware, many of the German courts ordered ornamental vases finely painted with chinoiserie. Delft faïence was also exported, certainly to the Southern Netherlands and France and probably to England as well. Precisely how the exportation and distribution was effected remains somewhat unclear, but what is certain is that all sorts of agents in Amsterdam and The Hague solicited business from foreigners or acted as contacts. Yet it was probably the entrepreneurs from outside the industry in the 1650s and 1660s who were able to promote it to make 'Dutch Porcelain' an international product, for

it was they who had the capital needed for such large scale expansion.

The period of prosperity for the delftware industry lasted until 1685, when once again porcelain started to be exported from China. The period between 1650 and 1680 remains interesting, not only from the point of view of the interaction between foreign trade and art, but also because the technical and artistic knowledge in Delft was of great importance to the development of delftware pottery in England, Germany and France.

In the 1660s and 1670s various professionals from Delft were involved in the founding of small factories outside the Dutch Republic. Factories founded by Dutchmen or with Dutch workers are known at Hanau (1661), Frankfurt (1666), Berlin (1678), St. Cloud near Paris (1667-8) and Lambeth in London (1671, by Jan Ariensz van Hamme). Certainly during the early years poor imitations were made of Delft products. Technical difficulties together with different clay and glaze compositions, lack of experience in running such a complex technical concern and a limited market would all have hampered progress.

During the 30 years under discussion, Delft produced mainly chinoiserie wares and determining the different producers of this product would make a fascinating study. It is also obvious that over 30 years (1650-1680) 25 Delft factories with 1500 employees produced much more than all the other European maiolica and faïence factories together. On statistical grounds alone it is for that reason impossible that a

small factory in Frankfurt am Main with only 35 employees could have produced more in only 15 to 20 years than the superior combined strength of the Delft faïence factories. How the Frankfurt production compared with the total production of chinoiserie decorated delftware, one can only guess. Was it coarser in sherd, tin enamel and decoration than the Delft counterparts?

In the same way that there are problems of attribution between Frankfurt or Delft pieces, similar difficulties arise over the Channel distinguishing from London delftware and Delft productions. As well as Christian Wilhelm and Christian Lowest who came to London from the Netherlands, we know that Jan Ariensz van Hamme¹⁰ also worked there. He arrived in London around 1675 with great experience but bankrupt. What did he produce? A possetpot dated 1687 (fig. 9) was given to the Rijksmuseum by the Loudon family in 1916 as Dutch delftware. This could however be one of Van Hamme's factory products. This shade of intense blue does not match the three different shades of blue that are typical of Dutch delftware in the 1680s and 1690s. Observations that the decoration of this object is much too good to be English are unconvincing.

This article only gives a short impression of the delftware production in the Netherlands up to 1670. Delftware after 1680 is much better known, as it was

collected in large quantities. It can be found in every museum in Europe and the United States of America. The study of the German, English, Belgian and perhaps French 17th century varieties and the Delft influence on these is a major but worthwhile undertaking.

NOTES

1. Ideas and facts are partly published in: J.D. van Dam, 'Geleyersgoet en Hollants Porceleyn': Mededelingenblad Nederlandse Vereniging van Vrienden van de Ceramiek, 1982/4, nr. 108, pp. 3-93.
2. Symposium 'Geleyersgoet en Hollants Porceleyn 1650-1660': Mededelingenblad Nederlandse Vereniging van Vrienden van de Ceramiek, 1983/3, nr. 111, p. 24.
3. See Th. Volker, Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, 1602-1682, Leiden 1954.
4. H. Tait, 'Southwark (alias Lambeth) Delftware and the Potter Christian Wilhelm': Connoisseur 1960, nr. 146, pp. 36-42; nr. 147, pp. 22-29.
5. J.D. van Dam, 'Vroege faïence uit Delft': Mededelingenblad Nederlandse Vereniging van Vrienden van de Ceramiek, 1989/3, nr. 135, pp. 6-10.
6. F. Britton, London Delftware, London 1987, p. 35.
7. H. Havard, La Céramique Hollandaise, Amsterdam 1909, tome second, p. 27.
8. J. Denucé, Na Peter Pauwel Rubens, Antwerpen 1949, pp. 24-25.
9. F. Hudig, 'Wapengoet en Porceleyn': Oud-Holland XLIII, 1926, pp. 162-167; D. Korf, 'Haarlemse majolica- en tegelbakkers': Mededelingenblad Vereniging van Vrienden van de Nederlandse Ceramiek, 1968, nr. 50, pp.
10. Op.cit. note 6, p. 59; C.H. de Jonge, Oud-Nederlandsche Majolica en Delftsch Aardewerk, Amsterdam 1947, p. 401.