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## Chinese porcelain and other orientalia and exotica in Spain during the Habsburg dynasty

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## INTRODUCTION

The reception of Chinese and Japanese export porcelain in Europe and the Americas has been the subject of much research, many publications and a number of exhibitions. The scholars and researchers involved could base themselves on a solid corpus of data, gathered in the past from a miscellany of sources. Although Spain was one of the most important commercial and colonial powers in the East during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, its role in the porcelain trade was far from clear, mainly due to the lack of research in the relevant primary sources. In fact, Spain was more or less a blank spot on the Western map relating to imports of Oriental porcelain.<sup>1</sup> This thesis aims to make a modest start to rectify this situation, offering an eclectic survey of hitherto unknown or unused sources, as well as a large collection of new data.

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<sup>1</sup> Only a few articles dealing specifically with Chinese porcelain during Habsburg-period Spain have been published to date. As far as archaeology of the period is concerned see: Etsuko Miyata Rodríguez, 'Chinese Ceramics Excavated from Northwest Spain (1)', in *The Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines Newsletter*, June 2008, pp. 8–10; and 'Chinese Ceramics Excavated from Northwest Spain (2)', in *The Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines Newsletter*, July, 2008, pp. 6–8; Jaume Coll Conesa, 'Documented Influence of China on Maiolica in Spain and New Finds of Chinese Ceramics with Dates to the Sixteenth Century', in Stacey Pierson (ed.) *Transfer: The Influence of China on World Ceramics, Colloquies on Art & Archaeology*, Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London, 2009, pp. 123–41; Jaume Coll Conesa, 'Cerámicas de Importación: series y cronología', in *Manual de Cerámica Medieval y Moderna*, Alcalá de Henares, 2011, pp. 273–304. For trade in Chinese porcelain during this period in Spain see: Teresa Canepa, 'The Portuguese and Spanish Trade in Kraak Porcelain in the Late 16th and Early 17th centuries', in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 73, London, 2009, pp. 61–78; Alfonso Pleguezuelo, 'Regalos del Galeón. Las Porcelanas y las Lozas Ibéricas de la Edad Moderna', in Alfredo José Morales Martínez (ed.), *Filipinas: Puerta de Oriente: de Legazpi a Malaspina*, Madrid, 2003, pp. 125–43; Articles dealing with collections of the Royal House and aristocracy: Cinta Krahe, 'El Coleccionismo de porcelana China en España: de curiosidad Real a mercadería de exportación', in Grupo de investigación Arte de Asia (ed.), *Orientando la Mirada. Arte asiático en colecciones públicas madrileñas*, exh. cat., Madrid, 2009, pp. 23–34; and by the same author, 'Porcelana china en la España del siglo XVI', in *Galería Anticuaria*, no. 225, 2004, pp. 40–46; Linda Shulsky, 'Philip II of Spain as Porcelain Collector', in *Oriental Art*, New Series, vol. 44, no. 2, 1998, pp. 51–54.

On the other hand, there are a number of important publications that deal with Chinese porcelain in Portugal and Holland. To name just a few: Christiaan J. A., Jörg, 'Kraakporselein', in *Antiek*, vol. 25, no. 2, Aug/Sept, 1990, pp. 53–64; Christiaan J. A., Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade*, The Hague, 1982; Christiaan J. A., Jörg, 'The Portuguese and the Trade in Chinese Porcelain. From the Beginning until the End of the Ming Dynasty', in A. Varela Santos (ed.), *Portugal na Porcelana da China. 500 Anos de Comércio*, Lisbon, 2007, pp. 45–71; Teresa Canepa, 'Kraak Porcelain: The Rise of Global Trade in the Late 16th and Early 17th Century', in Jorge Welsh (ed.), *Kraak Porcelain. The Rise of Global Trade in the Late 16th and 17th Centuries*, London, 2008, pp. 17–63; Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos (ed.), *Azul y Branco da China. Porcelana ao Tempo dos Descobrimentos. Coleção Amarel Cabral*, exh. cat., Lisbon, 1998; Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos, *Caminos da Porcelana – The Porcelain Route*, exh. cat., Lisbon, 1996; Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos, 'Macao and Porcelain for the Portuguese Market', in *Oriental Art*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2000, pp. 66–75; Maura Rinaldi, *Kraak Porcelain. A Moment in the History of Trade*, London, 1989; Maura Rinaldi, 'Kraak Porcelain. The History and Classification of Dishes', in *Heritage*, no. 8, Singapore, 1986, pp. 1–25; Maura Rinaldi, 'The Ceramic Cargo of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción', in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, vol. 57, 1992–1993, pp. 95–96; Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt, 'Les Porcelaines Chinoises du Palais de Santos', in *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 39, 1984, pp. 3–68; Nuno Vassallo e Silva, 'Precious Objects and Marvels: the Goa-Lisbon Trade', in Helmut Trnek and Nuno Vassallo e Silva (eds.), *Exótica. The Portuguese Discoveries and the Renaissance Kunstkammer*, exh. cat., Lisbon, 2002, pp. 27–37.

The research for this thesis has known its ups and downs and different methodologies were needed in order to get a broad survey. The initial idea was to focus on existing pieces of porcelain in a documented, early Spanish context, during the period of the Spanish Habsburg reign (1517-1700). Therefore the research began by placing inquiries with the curators of the palaces and monasteries known as the *Reales Sitios* and managed by the Spanish National Heritage Authority. They reported that no such pieces had survived. Even so, the records of their collections were checked for anything incorrectly catalogued. The conclusion drawn from this initial groundwork was that there were indeed no historical pieces from the Habsburg era remaining in the Royal collections in Spain.<sup>2</sup> Special commissions of Chinese porcelain for the Spanish market during the Habsburg period had been made but only a few pieces are preserved in non-Spanish museums and private collections.<sup>3</sup> Over the past few years, however, extensive research<sup>4</sup> has been conducted into Chinese porcelain from the later Bourbon dynasty, in particular the reign of King Philip V (1700–46) and his wife Elisabeth Farnese (1692–1766). This later 18<sup>th</sup> century export porcelain service partly is still extant in the Royal Palace in Madrid, although the inventory listing the pieces had not been traced. Recently, however, it was discovered and although beyond the scope of this work, I did translate it and have it included in this dissertation.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a recent publication discusses Spanish armorial decorations on eighteenth-cen-

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Ana García Sanz and Leticia Sánchez, curators of the Palacio Real, for their help. Other luxury items, such as lacquered objects, textiles and armour, are preserved to this day in Royal collections; see the Royal Palace exhibition catalogue, Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw, *Oriente en palacio. Tesoros asiáticos en las colecciones reales españolas*, Madrid, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Guan-type blue-and-white jars decorated with the emblem of the Augustinian Order – the double-headed eagle over a heart pierced with arrows beneath a coronet dated c. 1590-1635, and are to be found in several public institutions such as Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, the Roberto Blackmann Collection in Lisbon, the Hodroff Collection and Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, USA. See for a survey of such pieces W.R. Sargent, *Treasures of Chinese Export Ceramics from the Peabody Essex Museum*, New Haven, 2012, pp. 56-60. Two dishes decorated with the same motif, the double-headed eagle, are in the Peabody Essex Museum and a private collection. There is a plate ornamented with the coat-of-arms of García Hurtado de Mendoza, IV Marquis of Cañete that was probably ordered from Peru in around 1590–96 in private hands in Rocío Díaz, *Porcelana China para España*, 2010, p. 87-91. In addition we have to include the ‘famous’ bottles with round drum-like bodies decorated with the coat-of-arms of Castile and Leon quarterly, which were probably made at the end of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century during the reign of King Philip III (1598–1621). For the latest research into these bottles, see Rocío Díaz, ‘Armas de Castilla y León’, in Díaz, 2010, pp. 74–79. An important number of these bottles have survived, but only in non-Spanish and private collections.

<sup>4</sup> A number of articles have been published about Chinese porcelain in Royal Households during the Bourbon dynasty such as: Carmen García Ormaechea, ‘Los tibores de Isabel de Farnesio’, and ‘La Porcelana del Palacio Real’, in the exhibition catalogue by Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw, *Oriente en Palacio. Tesoros asiáticos en las Colecciones Reales Españolas*, Madrid, 2003, pp. 215–23 and pp. 225–39; A small booklet by Carmen García-Ormaechea, *Tibores Chinos en el Palacio Real de Madrid*, Madrid, 1987, is based on the large eighteenth-century ‘soldier’ vases in the Royal Palace (Madrid); Teresa Lavalle-Cobo, ‘El coleccionismo oriental de Isabel de Farnesio’, in *Oriente en palacio. Tesoros asiáticos en las colecciones reales españolas*, Madrid, 2003, pp. 212–14; Teresa Fernández Pereira, ‘Vajilla de Felipe V de la Compañía de Indias’, *Reales Sitios*, no. 116, Madrid, 1993, pp. 25–32. For texts about Chinese porcelain decorated with Spanish motifs during the eighteenth century see: Rocío Díaz, *Porcelana China para España*, London, 2010; Antonio Díaz de Rivera wrote several articles on Chinese porcelain in Spain during the eighteenth century such as ‘Proclamation Medals and Related Chinese Export Porcelain Services in the Reign of Charles IV of Spain’, in *Oriental Art*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2005–6, pp. 61–70; ‘Porcelanas chinas con blasón español en el siglo XVIII’, in *Antiquaria*, no. 177, Madrid, November 1999, pp. 70–76; ‘España y la Compañía de Indias’, in *Antiquaria*, no. 176, Madrid, October 1999; and finally ‘The Spanish Market’, in *Oriental Art*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1999, pp. 38–44. Carmen García-Ormaechea, ‘El coleccionismo de Arte Extremo Oriental en España: Porcelana China’, in *Artigrama*, no. 18, 2003, pp. 231–52.

<sup>5</sup> The inventory of the only Royal Chinese porcelain service made for King Philip V, dated circa 1730, was found during the research for this dissertation; see Documentary Appendix 1, Document 35, AGP, Sección Administración General, Legajo 770, Expediente 80. See Grupo de Investigación Complutense Arte de Asia,

tury Chinese porcelain; most pieces in this category are preserved in private hands and in non-Spanish public collections.<sup>6</sup>

This absence of Oriental porcelain begged the first question: why were no pieces left in Spain while other countries, like neighboring Portugal, preserved a considerable body despite numerous wars and earthquakes? One point in Portugal's favour was that it had direct trade with East Asia while Spanish trade with the East had to pass through Mexico. Other possible answers were that the Spanish Royal collection suffered enormous losses when the Alcázar of Madrid burned down on Christmas Eve, 1734, and again during the razing and disappearance of Philip IV's Buen Retiro Palace during the Peninsula War (1808–14).<sup>7</sup> Without a doubt these two events alone would account for severe gaps in the collections of porcelain as well as other luxury items such as furniture, silver or glass. Still, it is remarkable that no Chinese porcelain from this epoch survived anywhere in the Royal collections.

Without sufficient documented historic items to refer to, the research lead to a dead end. Attention therefore shifted from the actual pieces to references on Oriental porcelain mentioned in archives from the period. This proved to be a much more fruitful approach, although progress was slow due to the archaic script and the almost complete absence of digitalised files. I was acquainted, of course, with the few published inventories of Spanish monarchs' belongings, for example that of the collection of Chinese porcelain of Philip II, which was the largest collection in Europe at the time. Such printed sources were welcome additions, but I had mainly to rely on unpublished documents in order to be able to sketch the interest for Chinese porcelain in the circles of the Spanish Crown and the nobility, how it was distributed and how it was valued in different layers of the Spanish society at the time.

In a next stage it was decided to add yet another type of sources: archaeological data from excavations in Spanish cities. Shards of porcelains actually used in Spain compensated more or less the absence of complete, documented porcelains. In addition, archaeological evidence proved fundamental to complement the written sources. In each case photographs were taken, the body, glaze and decorations were analysed, and when possible, comparisons were made between the shards and unbroken pieces in foreign collections. Data were gathered using a geographical criterion, starting with Seville, the port of entrance of these goods; contextual information is based on the sites where the fragments were found.

A special category of archaeological evidence is constituted by porcelain found in salvaged shipwrecks. As an example, I concentrate on the cargo of the *San Diego* galleon, which sunk in Philippine waters in 1600.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, a fourth category of sources was added, namely paintings by Spanish artists of the period, mainly still lifes, that depicted Chinese porcelain as part of the scene. Although such seemingly naturalistic depictions have to be used with caution, they nevertheless give an indication of appreciation, status and use.

The main goal of this thesis, therefore, can be formulated as follows: to collect and present new, primary data on the importation, use and appreciation of Chinese porcelain and other exotica in Habsburg Spain, derived from these four categories of sources, namely references in archival documents, archaeological evidence, the few objects found in-situ and still lifes.

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2009, p. 144, ill. 37 and 30, and vol. II p. 128, of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Díaz, 2010. A few Spanish armorial pieces, dated to the eighteenth century, are preserved in the Museo Lázaro Galdiano, the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, and the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid; see Grupo de Investigación Complutense Arte de Asia, Madrid, *Orientando la Mirada. Arte Asiático en Colecciones Públicas Madrileñas*, exh. cat., Madrid, 2009. pp. 148-49

<sup>7</sup> J. Brown and J.H. Elliott, *Un Palacio para el Rey*, Madrid, 1981, pp. 253–54: 'By the time the French had retreated across the Pyrenees in the summer of 1813, the Retiro was in ruins. [...] Of the old Retiro there remained only the Hall of Realms [...], the Casón, and a pile of rubble.'

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul Desroches, Fr. Gabriel Casal and Franck Goddio, *Treasures of the San Diego*, New York, 1996. The exhibition *The Treasures of the San Diego* was presented in New York at the Philippine Consulate, in Paris at la Grande Halle de la Villette and at the Central Hispano Foundation in Madrid in 1996 and 1997.



I am aware that this is a rather traditional art-historical approach, which in my opinion nonetheless is necessary to facilitate further art-historical, historical and sociological research on Oriental objects in Spanish contexts. In this, the study of decorative art and the cultural history of exotic goods in Spain certainly lacks the tools that are available for historians, who have access to primary data that have been collected over the years for more analytical studies. Of course, as an art-historian I could not - and should not - refrain from giving occasional interpretations of the data I found, but these should be regarded as a side-effect, inviting others to continue; certainly I did this not exhaustive, nor was it the main objective of this thesis.

The approach sketched above dictated the organisation of this study.

After this introduction, chapter 1 is devoted to the historical context of relations between Spain and China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so that the setting embraces more than the framework of decorative arts alone. Period chronicles and letters gave information on what leading personalities of the day had to say on Chinese porcelain. It didn't take long before Chinese porcelain became a product in the trade in exotic items from China to the Philippines and thence to Mexico and Spain.

Chapter 2 is largely based on relevant publications on the Iberian countries' trading activities in Eastern Asian region during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Establishing how Oriental commodities reached Seville and who the leading players in the exotic goods trade were, required consulting the records at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, the repository of documents on the trade relations between Spain, America and the Philippines.

Chapter 3 is the core of this thesis. It deals with the documents consulted in various Spanish archives in order to gain a better overview of how Chinese porcelain was received and how widely it was collected in different sectors of society. The topic's broader interest resides in the fact that primary Spanish sources are largely unknown to art historians in Spain and abroad and for this reason it was decided also to check the consulted documents on mentions of other exotic items, apart from porcelain. I have tried to place the data yielded by the documents in the context of their time, to give some interpretations and identifications. The material is divided into chronologically arranged sections, dealing with royalty, the nobility, merchants and other individuals. To flesh out the main information, references were also collected from contemporary testimonies given in letters, narrations and stories written by travellers in Spain that reflected on Spanish society, life and the customs of the day. It closes with a discussion about the use and display in Spanish households.

A vast corpus of new and hitherto unknown data was collected from inventories, appraisals, estate partition documents, dowry receipts and wills. They have all been transcribed and translated into English and are published in full in part 2 of this thesis. Quotations are used to support arguments in this chapter.

Finally, chapter 4 examines the actual Chinese porcelains. A large section is devoted to porcelain shards found during archaeological excavations in different Spanish cities. Such a basic survey had not yet been attempted, and although I will have missed information, I think I covered enough ground to be able to draw conclusions on the material I have seen. Not being an archaeologist, however, I heavily relied on the contextual data provided by others. Connected to this is the short discussion on shipwreck finds, in particular those from the *San Diego*. Then follows a description of the only three extant pieces in Spain that have a pre-1700 provenance.

A discussion of Spanish period paintings, in particular still lifes depicting porcelain (or porcelain imitations) closes this chapter. There is a wide variety of examples in other countries such as the Netherlands and England, but this source had not yet been explored in Spain.

Fig. 1. The exhibition *Treasures of the San Diego*. New York, 1996.

To conclude this introduction, something has to be said about the various public collections in Spain containing Oriental porcelain from various later periods. These collections do include items of Habsburg-era Chinese porcelain, but only as latecomers, donated after the Habsburgs had declined. The first such collection is in the city of Ávila, in the Oriental Museum housed in the Royal Monastery of Saint Thomas. The second is in Valladolid, in the Oriental Museum at the Royal College of the Augustinian Fathers. These two collections were studied and catalogued by Carmen García-Ormaechea in her doctoral dissertation *Porcelana China en España* in 1985.<sup>9</sup> Dominican missionaries residing in the East (Hong Kong, Macao and the Philippines) sent most of the pieces in the Ávila Collection from abroad for the 1925 Vatican Exposition and the 1929 Barcelona World Fair. When the exhibitions ended, the objects were returned to the missionary houses, though many pieces were lost. When the museum's director, Isaac Liqueste, arrived in Ávila in 1964, he found only 50 pieces, but the number grew with acquisitions made by the Order's members during the twentieth century. The collection at the Oriental Museum at the Augustinian Monastery has experienced a similar history. Missionaries and other individuals donated some of the objects, but the vast majority of pieces entered the museum's collection in 1925 for the Vatican Exposition. Many porcelain items were sent to Rome from various areas of China, and, though the best remained in Rome, many were returned to the monastery in Valladolid, where they can be appreciated today. About 100 of the nearly 400 pieces in the museum's collection are on display. They are placed in chronological order by dynasty, from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) to the Qing period (1644–1911).<sup>10</sup>



Other collections of Oriental porcelain were formed in the nineteenth century in the city of Madrid. The Oriental ceramics in the National Museum of Decorative Arts and the Archaeological Museum were catalogued by Fernando Tabar de Anitúa in *Cerámicas de China y Japón en el Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas*<sup>11</sup>, published in 1983. The Cerralbo Museum in Madrid contains the private collection of the seventeenth Marquis of Cerralbo, Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa (1845–1922), who donated it to the state in the twentieth century. Fernando Tabar de Anitúa published the collection in *Lujo Asiático. Artes de Extremo Oriente y chinerías en el Museo Cerralbo* in Madrid in 2004<sup>12</sup>. There are other collections in Spain containing Chinese and Japanese porcelain, all formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among others they include the Rodríguez-Acosta Foundation's collection in Granada<sup>13</sup>, created by painter José María Rodríguez-Acosta in 1941, and painter Joaquín Sorolla's collection, now in the Sorolla Museum in Madrid.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Carmen García-Ormaechea, *Porcelana china en España*, Ph.d. diss, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Blas Sierra de la Calle, *Museo Oriental. China, Japón Filipinas. Obras selectas*, Valladolid, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Fernando Tabar de Anitúa, *Cerámicas de China y Japón en el Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas*, Madrid, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Fernando Tabar de Anitúa, *Lujo Asiático. Artes de Extremo Oriente y chinerías en el Museo Cerralbo*, Madrid, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Carmen García-Ormaechea, *Colección de arte asiático. Fundación Rodríguez Acosta*, Granada, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Carmen Padilla Montoya, *Museo Sorolla. Catálogo de cerámica*, Madrid, 1992.



