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Pottery Heirlooms from Mindanao

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American courts. Philippine constitutional theory is growing under the aegis of Philippine experience.

JOAQUIN G. BERNAS

Pottery Heirlooms from Mindanao

Among the many antique pottery and porcelain heirlooms from Mindanao that have eventually turned up in private collections in Manila, there is a "blue-and-white" porcelain dish delicately painted in a deep blue under the glaze. A mountain and water scene is depicted with two fishermen seated side by side under two trees in the foreground, and a "diaper pattern" border round the mouth-rim. The dish is saucer-shaped, with rounded sides and shallow foot-rim. It is a little over 11 inches in diameter, covered with a smooth glaze of bluish cast. Its glazed base bears six greyish spur-marks and a four-character reign-mark in underglaze blue.

This reign-mark occasioned not a few uncertainties which were somewhat dispelled when a certain Mr. Takeyama identified the first two characters as *Man Reki*, the Japanese term for Wan-Li whose reign (1573-1619) is considered in Chinese ceramic history as the last of the three periods of the Ming dynasty that were noted for the vast output and quality of all types of porcelains previously manufactured.

Reign-marks should however not be taken as the sole criterion for identifying porcelains. Many a convincing copy of a Ming piece has led an optimistic collector to initial joy and subsequent disappointment; and this disappointment could very well have been ours had we taken the Wan-Li mark at the back of this dish at face value.

A closer examination of the dish's features tends to show that it would be more appropriately classified as a probable Arita copy of a Wan-Li original. A free-style translation of Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt's description of Arita copies of Wan-Li "blue-and-white" wares follows:

The 'blue-and-white' wares of the Wan-Li period were strictly copied at Arita in the seventeenth century, but these copies are distinguished from the originals by the more diligently applied minute details of the designs, and perhaps by a fancy touch that conveys the peculiar vision of the Japanese artist. Moreover, and this remark serves [as basis] for all the comparisons one could possibly bring about, the bodies of Japanese porcelain wares are greyer and less fine than those of the Chinese. The glaze [of the Japanese porcelains] being less clear and more greyish, causes the decoration to show through milky and hazy depths that Hobson had compared to 'mousseline'. The foot-rims are in general, shallow. In fact, many of these porcelains bear spur-marks that do not exist in Chinese porcelains.¹

Earlier in the same book, the author states that Ming and Ch'ing porcelains, unlike Japanese porcelains, never bear spur-marks.

¹ *Les poteries et porcelains chinoises*, p. 143.

Another find that turned up early in 1961, from a rather decrepit-looking batch of Maranaw gewgaws, was a six-panelled vase (or ginger jar?). This porcelain piece has an "aster" decoration in deep cobalt-blue that had turned greenish black in some parts. The overglaze is of a bluish tinge. The neck is unglazed while the base is only partly glazed. It must have once upon a time had a cover.

Although it boasts of no *nien hao* (reign-mark), it may be safely ascribed to the transition period (1620-1683) from the Ming to the Ch'ing dynasty.

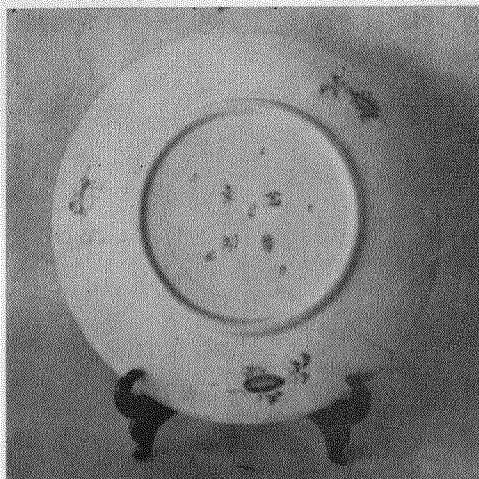
The following are the pertinent portions in Daisy Lion-Goldschmidt's work:²

An important group of porcelains of magnificent quality is ascribed to this epoch and [the period] beyond that, until well before the reign of Kang-hsi. This [group] is comprised of vases, bottles, ovoid potiches, and rarely, plates and bowls, and a series of objects of European shapes... Stiff flowers with symmetrically arranged petals (tulips?), adorn the sides of some bottles... Drawing is free and full of sensibility. The body and the glaze are of excellent quality; the blues are deep, of shaded tones, very different from the uniform blues of the other Ming reigns. The bases, almost always unglazed, do not bear any marks.

One other specimen, with a more blackish underglaze blue, however, is known to the writer, and is in the Beyer collection. That piece, unlike the subject of this paper which was an heirloom before it was disposed of by its former owner, was excavated from a Philippine burial-site.

ISABELITA R. AUROY

² *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101. Our translation.



Back of dish showing
four-character "nien hao"
and six spur-marks.

Arita Dish With Wan-Li Reign Mark?
Height 1.75 in., Diameter 11.5 in.



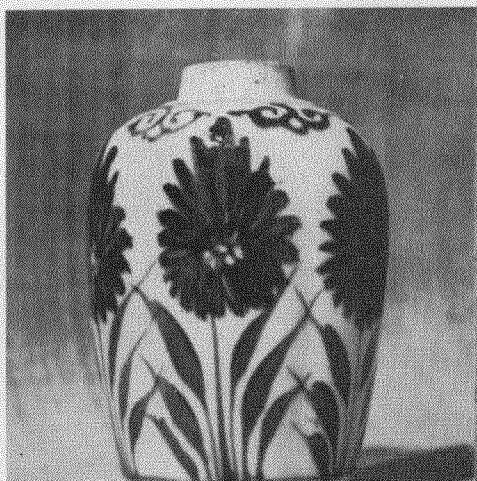
Face of dish showing mountain
and water scene

"Diaper" pattern border

H.: 1.75" D.: 11.5"

(From a private collection)

(Photographs: courtesy of Mr. N. C. Jamir)



"Blue-and-White" Porcelain Vase (or
Ginger Jar?) Probably Transition Period
(1620-1683)

H.: 4" D.: 2 3/4"

(Author's Collection)