

RÖBBIG · MÜNCHEN

Frühe Porzellane · Kunsthandel



A TEA AND COFFEE SERVICE, “GLATT,” PAINTED WITH POLYCHROME CHINOISERIE SCENES

Circa: 1773

Six coffee cups, ten teacups, sixteen saucers, coffee pot, teapot, milk pot, slop bowl

KPM Berlin, c. 1770/75

“Glatt,” painted with polychrome chinoiserie scenes

Blue sceptre mark and various impressed numerals

Both the tea and the coffee cups of this service have rounded sides and C-shaped handles. The service model was known as “glatt” (meaning “smooth”), i.e., all the upper rims are circular and plain in shape, without moulded decoration. They stand on a foot ring, as do the shallow bowl-like saucers, the slop bowl, and the coffee pot. The pots all have the same basic forms, though the coffee and milk pot are pear-shaped while the teapot is fundamentally spherical. All the handles and spouts were modelled with a moulded rocaille relief, while the knobs

on the covers take the form of flowers.

Running around the rims of the cups, saucers, and rinsing bowl is a gold latticework border with a diaper pattern of little gold stars regularly alternating with iron-red scale-pattern cartouches that expand downwards. Hanging on golden strapwork marking off the latticework from the fields of scales are iron-red and gold garlands that grow out of the points of the cartouches. This border likewise decorates the transition between body and cover on the tea, coffee, and milk pots, while the reliefs on the spouts, handles, and finials are delicately painted in iron-red and gold.

The large collection of tea, coffee, and dining services that Frederick the Great ordered from Meissen during his Saxon campaign in the Seven Years War had also included porcelain with this kind of diapered Mosaik decoration. Preserved at Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin is a coffee cup and saucer bearing a Mosaik border with a pattern of scales in iron-red that was part of the shipment of seventy-nine chests containing the Prussian king's commissions from Saxony. The service of which the said cup formed a part was described as a "coffee service with Indian applied decoration, gold Mosaik rim, the applied elements painted in red, the stalks in gold, made up of 6 pairs of coffee cups, 6 pairs of chocolate cups and 7 pieces of the usual size, for 145 Reichstaler," [Coffee Service mit Indianischen Belegen, gold Mosaïque Rand, das Belege roth gemahlt, die Stiehle Gold, von 6 paar Coffe Tassen, 6 paar Chocolate-Tassen, 7 gewöhnlichen große Stücken, pro 145 rt] (quoted in Wittwer 2010, p. 33). Immediately after its arrival in Potsdam it was copied by the Gotzkowsky manufactory in Berlin; later, the décor passed into the repertoire of the Royal Porcelain Manufactory (KPM).

Preserved at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg is a coffee and tea service and a cup and saucer displaying a latticework border comparable to that on the present service, though without the pendant garlands (see exh. cat. Hamburg 1993, cat. no. 75 and cat. nos. 133–37). Both the Hamburg groups of objects are examples of the "glatt" model and date from around 1775.

The smooth sides and wells of all the elements in the service are painted with chinoiserie scenes after Boucher and Watteau, some of the graphic sources for which have been preserved in the archive of the Royal Porcelain Manufactory KPM at Charlottenburg. These are engravings or etchings executed by Jacques Gabriel Huquier (1695–1772), Michel-Guillaume Aubert (1704–1757), Pierre Alexandre Avelin the Younger (1702–1760), and Jean-Josephe Balchou (1716–1764). While some scenes were copied faithfully onto the porcelain ground, others vary the composition of the graphic sources or are made up of elements from a number of different ones.

As porcelain had played a central role in the official image of the Brandenburg court from the mid-seventeenth century, the young prince later to rule Prussia as King Friedrich II (b. 1712, reg. 1740–86) and become known as "Frederick the Great" grew up in a milieu of which "white gold" was a prominent feature. In 1660 his great-grandmother Louise Henriette of Nassau-Oranien (1627–1667) had embellished the palace of Oranienburg with one of the first porcelain cabinets to be created in the entire German-speaking world. Further porcelain rooms followed at Caputh, Malchow, and Charlottenburg, which Friedrich III/I (b. 1657, reg. 1688/1701–13) made into vehicles of political propaganda by investing them with an iconography specifically designed to underpin the royal status that he had acquired in 1701.

As far as porcelain is concerned, King Friedrich Wilhelm I (reg. 1713–40) is best known for the exchange he conducted with Augustus the Strong in the spring of 1717 in which the "Soldier King" parted with 151 vases from the rich stock of porcelain at the palaces of Oranienburg and Charlottenburg in return for 600 cavalry soldiers from a Saxon army that was being cut down in size. His wife Sophie Dorothea, on the other hand, built up a notable collection of both East Asian and Meissen porcelain at the palace of Monbijou.

On two occasions in 1728 the crown prince Friedrich visited Augustus the Strong's Japanese Palace in Dresden in the company of his father. As is shown by various letters from Sophie Dorothea to her son, even as early as 1737 the young Friedrich was laying plans to found a porcelain manufactory of his own. However, his plans were not realised until 1763, when he took possession of the Berlin manufactory that had originally been founded by Caspar Wegely in 1751 and was taken over by Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky in 1761.

Although the years up to and including 1762 had seen King Friedrich ordering large quantities of porcelain from

Meissen, from 1763 onwards he was only interested in the wares and creations of his own Royal Porcelain Manufactory. In his own oft-quoted words, he was not only the proprietor of the manufactory but also its best customer. By his death in 1786 he had purchased around two hundred thousand thalers worth of porcelain, some destined for his personal use and some for use as private or state gifts for recipients including Catherine the Great of Russia, the Prince of Liechtenstein, the Margrave of Ansbach, and William V of Orange.

In the course of his reign Frederick the Great commissioned a total of twenty-one different table services from his manufactory. In many cases there was clearly a connection between the design of the services and the interior décor of the locations where they were to be used. This is true, for example, of the so-called “Japanese Dining Service” made for Sanssouci, which deserves special mention in connection with the present coffee and tea service.

The Japanese Service for twenty-four persons made by the KPM in the years 1769/70 was originally intended for the Japanese House in the garden at Sanssouci, which also boasted a Chinese kitchen built for Frederick by Friedrich Johann Gottfried Buring in the years 1754–57. However, this building in the Asian manner turned out to be too cold to be used for dining, so that the service was finally put into service in the palace of Sanssouci itself. The so-called Second Sanssouci Service, made to the model Neuglatt or Königsglatt, is decorated with chinoiserie scenes after François Boucher, Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), and Jean-Baptiste Pillement (1728–1808).

As on the present coffee and tea service, the chinoiseries were executed on a smooth surface. Rather than filling the whole flat space available or, on the cups and pots, running uninterruptedly around the sides, they constitute little scenes in their own right. The centre of the composition is always occupied by a figural group surrounded on three sides by various architectural elements or vegetation. The grass or earth on which the figures stand runs downwards through leaf-like elements into the white of the porcelain surface, in a style also found in such works as Boucher’s Five Senses.

The striking similarity between the painted decoration on the two Berlin chinoiserie services is remarkable. Nor does this similarity relate simply to the choice of motifs but also, and most particularly, to the style of decoration and quality of execution.

Literature:

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