

## FAR EASTERN INFLUENCES

### A Japanese Arita *kraak* dish c.1660-80 in the Chinese manner



1. Arita dish, *kraak* style of decoration, c.1660-80. Private collection.

Paste: hard paste porcelain.

Decoration: painted underglaze blue.

Size: diameter 39.2 cm, height 7.1 cm.

Maker's marks: none.

Identifying characteristics: four spur marks within the foot rim.

This Arita dish of c.1660-80 (1) is a close copy of Ming dishes produced in the late Ming Dynasty (Wanli Reign) in Jingdezhen c.1590-1610. (2)

The central 'ducks-in-a-pond' motif in the decoration on the dish was a popular one. The outer panels or medallions carry Daoist or The Eight Treasures symbols, auspicious symbols mostly concerned with longevity, as if to ward off the dangers of wars and famines.<sup>1</sup>



2. Ming *kraak* dish, c.1590-1610, diameter 36.4 cm, height 6.3 cm. © British Museum (Franks.275.+).



3a. The back of the Arita dish.



3b. A close up of the foot showing the stilt marks and fused sand.



4. A side view of the Arita dish.

The foot of the dish has four spur marks; a feature of Arita wares of the period, and unusually also fused sand deposits to the foot rim indicating that, as well as the spurs, the dish was supported in the kiln during firing on a bed of sand. (3b) Without the spur marks, one could believe that the fused sand deposits indicate Chinese manufacture, though some stylistic detail in the decoration is notably Japanese.

These *kraak* dishes were produced in a range of sizes from diameters of approximately 14 cm up to the largest with diameters of approximately 56 cm in both China and Japan.

The name 'kraak' probably derives from the Portuguese vessel used to carry ceramic cargoes from the East to Europe at the time, called a carrack (Portuguese, *carraca*), but the origin is not certain. 'Kraken' in Dutch means 'to break easily', and may also have something to do with the origin of the term.<sup>2</sup>

*Kraak* porcelain represents a turning point in Chinese ceramic production, when blue and white porcelain was produced in huge quantities, almost exclusively for export and particularly to Europe from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> *Kraak* wares have been found in Chinese tombs however. A similar dish was excavated in 1979 in the tomb of Zhu Yiyin, the Prince of Yixuan (1537-1603), in Nancheng, Jiangxi Province.<sup>4</sup>

With the severe curtailment of ceramic production in China during and following the wars that saw the demise of the Ming Dynasty in 1644 and their replacement in power by the Qing Dynasty beginning with the reign of Shunzhi (1644-1661), Japanese potters seized the opportunity to produce their own versions of the *kraak* style with some success. The subject dish of this paper is a good example of that development.

Patrick Hagglund, November 2020

## References

---

<sup>1</sup> Rinaldi, Maura, *Kraak porcelain – A moment in the history of trade* (London: Bamboo Publishing Ltd, 1989), pp 100-1.

<sup>2</sup> Rinaldi, *Kraak porcelain*, p 60.

<sup>3</sup> Rinaldi, *Kraak porcelain*, p 60.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison-Hall, Jessica, *Ming Ceramics - Catalogue of Late Yuan and Ming ceramics in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2001), catalogue no. 11:107.