

Inspiration and imitation II: A West-East-West story

One may be inclined to assume that European ceramic decoration in the 18th century was always inspired by East Asia, principally China or Japan, when an influence was involved between East and West, and that imitation merely followed such inspiration. The case that follows demonstrates that this was not always the case, and the sequence of such inspiration and imitation was sometimes more complex.

In the 1750s, the Bow factory produced teawares decorated with scenes in the style of painting of the Delft potter and decorator, Frederik van Frytom. (1) It is however generally accepted that this decoration imitated porcelains from Arita in Japan.



1. Bow cup, painted in blue under glaze in the manner of Frederik van Frytom, soft-paste porcelain, c.1753-6, H 5.7 cm, unmarked. Private collection.

Frederik van Frytom (or Frijtom) (c.1632-1702), whose place and date of birth are not known, spent his working life in the Dutch city of Delft, being possibly born in the same year as the universally known resident artist of that city, Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). Although very little is known of the life of van Frytom, he is acknowledged today as a master of his art of pottery decoration.¹

The harbour scene on the subject Bow cup is remarkably similar to the scene painted by van Frytom on the 1684-dated heart-shaped tin-glazed earthenware (delft) dish illustrated in Vecht (1968). (2) The van Frytom landscape is purely of the Low Countries, real or imaginary, and does not in any way point to an Eastern inspiration, which is in keeping with his work, whereas the figures on the quayside in the Bow decoration appear dressed in Eastern-style clothing.

It is worthy of note that Vecht records that the van Frytom dish was 'made for the tea-ceremony in Japan', although this claim may be called into question.² With this statement, we are guided to Japanese



40

40 DISH, HEART-SHAPED WITH
RAISED, LOBED RIM
(made for the tea-ceremony in Japan)

On the flat surface, within a blue line, a jetty, masts, two figures and a man in a rowing-boat. To the right a boat sailing on a broad stretch of water. In the distance a village. Blue border.

Marked on the back: MB
1684

Width: 5 1/8 ins., 13 cm.
Vecht Collection, Amsterdam.

2.Vecht, A, *Frederik van Frytom 1632-1702* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema NV, 1968), p.76, 'Catalogue of work of Frederik van Frytom' number 40.

wares to establish whether this harbour scene was used in the potteries there, and it was. In fact, Arita porcelains decorated with this harbour scene are found extant in numbers. This examination of the subject Bow cup is extended here by comparing an Arita porcelain tea bowl with the Bow cup, **(3)** thus enabling further comparison of the Arita and Bow pieces back to the van Frytom dish of 1684.



3a



3b



3c



3d

3. Comparison of a Japanese Arita bowl c.1700 and the Bow cup in **(1)**, rotated to show the full painted harbour scene on each piece. Private collection.

The Arita and Bow decoration on the bowl and cup in **(3)** share several features:

- The solid wavy line rim border. (Notice that the Bow cup does not have the thin line below the solid blue wavy pattern. Bow used the solid wavy line border with the thin line, as in the Arita decoration, on a rare and fine chocolate pot sold by Sotheby's New York in 2019 **(4)**, and other Bow examples may have been made. This Arita-style border was also used at Bow in the so-called 'Golfer and Caddy' pattern, though this latter chinoiserie pattern has no van Frytom origin.)
- Clouds are depicted with tightly scalloped lines, very unusual for English porcelain decoration.
- The strange trees with bent trunks growing from low hills or rocks as in **(3d)**.

These features are not to be found in van Frytom's decoration on his delftware dish of 1684.



4. A rare Bow chocolate or coffee pot and cover, c.1750, incised 'R' to base, H. 23.2 cm. ©Sotheby's, New York, Lot 33, 23 October 2019.

There are several examples of the use of the van Frytom harbour scene on dishes from Japan, China and Bow. (5, 6, 7) The Chinese apparently copied the Japanese Arita wares. The heart-shaped examples are remarkably like the van Frytom delftware dish dated 1684, save for the depiction of the clouds. The Bow use of this landscape pattern is surely copied from the Arita wares, the latter predating Bow by half a century. Similarly, the Chinese version echoes that of Arita, being produced in the mid-18th century as at Bow.



5. Japanese Arita Porcelain Dish in the Style of Frederik van Frytom c.1690 – 1730. ©Robert Mcpherson Antiques.



6. Bow dish c.1755-60. ©Victoria & Albert Museum, London (C.403-1924).



7. Bow (left) and Chinese Qianlong (right) heart-shaped dishes in the style of Frederik van Frytom. Phillips, London, *The Watney Collection of Fine Early English Porcelain, Part 1*, 22 September 1999, Lot 22.

This journey through the use of van Frytom's harbour scene decoration on his original 1684 delftware dish demonstrates that inspiration and imitation of ceramic decorative motifs in the 18th century between East Asia and Europe could be more complicated than a one-way relationship. Trade between Japan, China and Europe provided the opportunity for such influences to be adopted on the wares on both sides of the geographical divide. As appealing as chinoiserie and Japanese-style decoration proved to be to the European market at the time, so European motifs were also of appeal to the Chinese and Japanese, even if that appeal may have been spurred by the trading potential of their export market to Europe.

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Notes

¹ Vecht, A, *Frederik van Frytom 1632-1702* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema NV, 1968), pp.25-29.

² Lang, Gordon, *The Wrestling Boys: An exhibition of Chinese and Japanese ceramics from the 16th to the 18th century in the collection at Burghley House* (Stamford: Burghley House Preservation Trust Ltd., 1983), p.11.