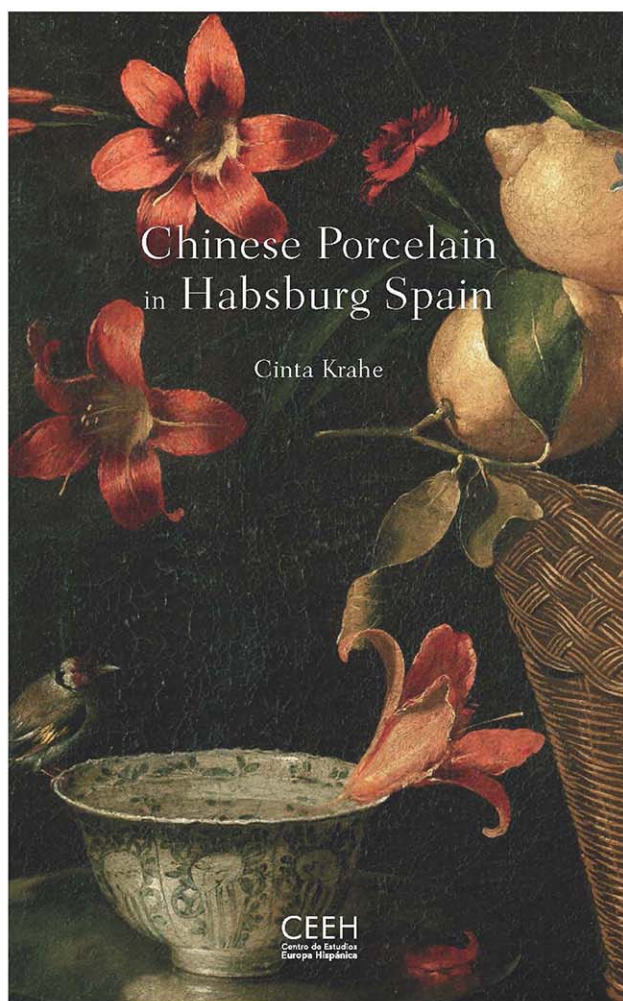


BOOK REVIEW



Chinese Porcelain in Habsburg Spain, by Cinta Krahe, published by Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, Madrid, 2016. Foreword, Acknowledgements, Abbreviations and Translations, Preface, five chapters, Glossary, Bibliography and Index, 598 pages, 230 colour illustrations, 28 × 17.5 cm. ISBN: 978-84-15245-51-3. £57 (hard cover). Website: www.ceeh.es.

ART HISTORY is a seemingly traditional and straightforward discipline. Those of us who practise it tend to study tangible works of art and look at their visual, formal and contextual characteristics. Occasionally, however, a subject will confront us which poses challenges. What do we do, for example, if we wish to study an object that no longer exists? Can we really carry out an art historical analysis of something that may no longer have any physical presence? Just such a problem confronted the author of a new study of Chinese porce-

lain in Habsburg Spain. In her book of that title, Cinta Krahe presents a masterful study of Chinese porcelain in 16th–17th century Spain where very few traces of such porcelains remain. Spain in the 18th century was awash with Chinese porcelain, especially in royal residences, but the previous ruling house, the Habsburgs, seemed to have little interest in it, with few exceptions. A number of studies, particularly those focusing on the reign of Phillip II (reigned 1556–1598), have suggested otherwise. He was known to have amassed over 3000 pieces but, strangely, almost none survive in Spain today, at least as physical objects. As this book demonstrates, however, he was the exception.

Krahe set out to discover why so little was known about Chinese porcelain in 16th–17th century Spain and in doing so has created not only the first survey history of this subject, but also has published a comprehensive



Chinese Dining, drawing from manuscript *Viaje de la China* (1625), by Adriano de las Cortes. British Library, London

collection of primary sources and study tools relating to it. This is exceptionally valuable for both scholarship and the connoisseurship of Chinese porcelain in pre-18th century Europe.

The book begins with an introduction to the problems associated with the subject and its research. Few actual pieces remain, so evidence has to be found elsewhere. Textual sources are available, and would prove to be a cornerstone of the research conducted here, but these too were associated with challenges. One obvious one was terminology. Modern Spanish is somewhat different from that which was spoken and written in the 16th and 17th centuries, so dictionaries of the time also had to be sourced and consulted. In addition, the language used in the documents was often vague, especially with reference to descriptions of objects, prices paid for them and their function, so this too had to be navigated.

In order to understand the documents and the consumption of porcelain in Spain at the time, the historical, cultural and eco-

nomic contexts had first to be explored and this is laid out in detail, but accessibly, in the second chapter of the book. Trade routes and the mechanics of both overseas and intercontinental trade are the focus, with the financing of this and subsequent sale mechanisms explained. A number of interesting points arise from this, including the import of Chinese porcelain from Algeria, the role of Lisbon in Spanish acquisitions as well as the significant part played by religious missions in the trade and in the documentation of it. One such example, the manuscript *Viaje de la China* by Adriano de las Cortes (1625), includes illustrations such as the one reproduced here, showing a banquet scene in China. Further illustrations, which support this chapter very well, include clearly designed maps and contemporary drawings which show, for example, Veracruz and the Port of Acapulco in 1628.

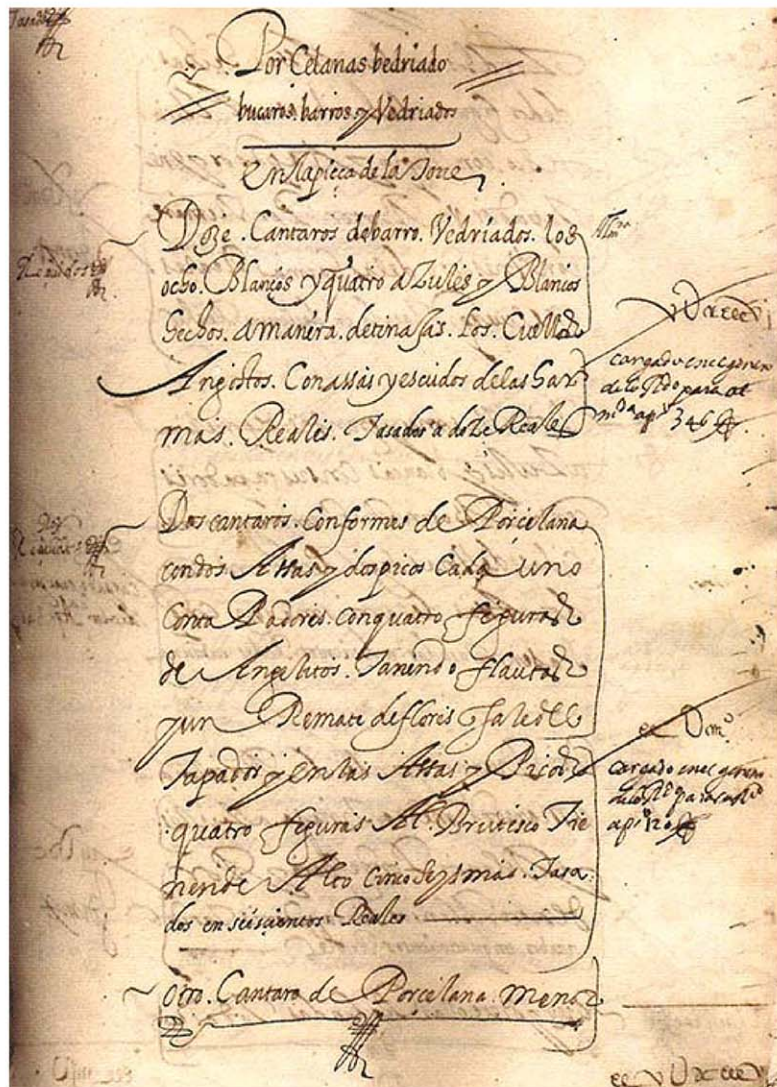
The next chapter discusses the use and display of Chinese porcelain in Habsburg Spain, as evidenced in primary documents



Adrian Boot, *The Port of Acapulco, New Spain*. 1628.
Hand-coloured lithography, 43 x 56 cm.
Archive of Antonio Pareja, Toledo



Adrian Boot, *View of Veracruz*. 1628. Drawing, 55 x 42 cm.
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



First page of King Philip II's inventory of porcelains and glazes. 1602.
Manuscript. Patrimonio Nacional, Archivo del Palacio Real, Madrid



Blue and white bowl with gold leaf decoration applied over the glaze (side, interior and exterior views). Late 16th century,
Wanli reign (1573–1620). Height 7.7 cm, diameter 10.5 cm. Church of Santa María de los Corporales, Daroca, Zaragoza



Leather case for the Daroca bowl (side, top and interior views). Late 16th century,
Church of Santa María de los Corporales, Daroca, Zaragoza

such as household inventories, lists of objects for sale to clear debts and even export licences. The range of documents sourced and explored here is notable and, even more importantly, most have been transcribed and translated into English and provided in the book in an extensive appendix. This is a hugely valuable resource and must have been a tremendous amount of work for the author. Throughout this chapter, as we can see for ourselves in these documents, a range of consumers are shown to have acquired and used Chinese porcelains, characterising this site for consumption as somewhat unimpressed by this foreign product. As Krahe notes, the enthusiasm for Chinese porcelain was “sporadic” and only one particular ruler was really interested in it—Phillip II. The inventory of goods prepared for sale eleven years after his death, in 1598 (illustrated here), tells us how it was classified, and therefore valued at court (not highly), but also what key items were called—the *kendi* was a “garrafa”, for example. Krahe also looked at household inventories for members of the nobility and clergy, merchants and artists, revealing that one merchant had a *kunstkammer* (and therefore ideas above his station) and that the artist Velazquez owned some Chinese porcelain, but sadly appears not to have painted it.

In the fourth chapter, Krahe presents the material evidence, beginning with the four surviving whole pieces which are, like almost everything else in this book, admirably illustrated in colour. The number of images in this book is exceptional for a scholarly publication and contributes not only to the pleasure of reading it, but also to its utility for both scholars and collectors. The four surviving pieces are themselves of particular interest, as they include a mounted bowl with a decorated leather case and a blue and white garden seat from a convent, which appears to be in remarkable condition. Further material evidence is supplied by archaeology, but even this is notably scant. Krahe documents it all here, however, and includes some of the earliest pieces found in Spain, and possibly Europe, such as the late Tang dynasty (618–907) Xing ware fragment with a gold Kufic inscription around its

rim. There are so many interesting finds in this chapter that it is difficult to choose which ones to single out here, but the fragments of a Chinese copy of a Meissen-style cup found in a monastery have to be noted.

Shipwreck finds are also mentioned, with a very useful list of better known Spanish ships provided on pp. 257–258. The *San Diego* is discussed as a case study, and confirms that most of the porcelain destined for Spain and the Spanish Empire was *kraak*-style tableware. Even at court in Habsburg Spain, Chinese porcelain was relegated to the table, and the inventories consulted here confirm this through both designation and descriptions of wear and tear. Broken pieces also appear in paintings featuring Chinese porcelain, which are the subject of the final part of the material evidence chapter of this book. A number of painters, who

are listed here, populated their genre pictures with Chinese porcelains. For the most part, they are shown as tablewares but, as Krahe notes, these scenes are not nearly as lavish as contemporary examples from northern Europe. The study of some of these paintings has raised some conundrums, such as the illustration of porcelain styles or shapes that have not been documented before or that appear here before they are commonly assumed to have been produced in China.

In her concluding chapter, Krahe modestly summarises the main aims of the book—to provide a survey of Chinese porcelain in Habsburg Spain—and demonstrates not only the necessity of exploring this overlooked topic, but also the wider applications of such a study in both methodology and results. The way the book is presented further ensures that it will appeal both

to scholars, who can now read the original documentary evidence with ease, and collectors and specialists in porcelain, who wish to identify designs and forms, dates for production, and study provenance in Europe. These are all noted by Krahe, but she could also have noted that this book is a valuable work for social and economic historians, who could use a lot of the data provided here as a starting point for further studies of Habsburg Spain and its cultures.

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Blue and white garden seat (three views), Jingdezhen, Zhengde reign (1506–1521). Diameter 63 cm. Convent of the Capuchinas, Toledo



Shard of a whiteware bowl with a Kufic inscription. Probably Xing ware, circa 10th century, late Tang dynasty (618–907). Museo de Almería



Shards of a Meissen-style gold and red bowl (two views). Jingdezhen, circa 1740, Qianlong reign (1736–1795). Monastery of Pedralbes, Barcelona