

# NEWSLETTER

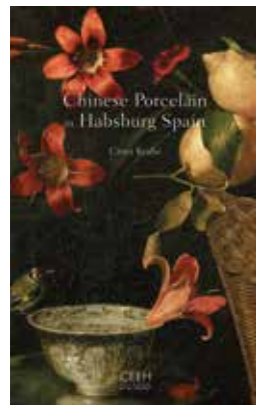
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## Chinese Porcelain in Habsburg Spain

Cinta Krahe, Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica (CEEH), Madrid, 2016, 597 pp., ISBN 978-8415245513, £55.00.



*Chinese Porcelain in Habsburg Spain* by Cinta Krahe is based on the author's two-volume doctoral dissertation for Leiden University, The Netherlands. This lavishly illustrated book fills an important gap in our general knowledge of the commercial and cultural exchanges that occurred between China and Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Spain was ruled by the Habsburgs (1517–1700). In China, this period corresponded to the late Ming (1638–1644) and early Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, when many political and social changes took place.

As extant textual and material evidence of the importation, distribution and consumption

of Chinese porcelain in Habsburg Spain during this period is scant, and virtually no pieces have survived in the royal collection, Krahe embarked on an exhaustive interdisciplinary study of various previously unknown or unused sources. Her many years of research in several archives in Spain – especially the General Archive of the Indies (Archivo General de Indias) in Seville that preserves documents relating to the commercial activities between Spain, and the Spanish colonies in the Philippines and the New World – proved to be fruitful. The book has brought to light a remarkable number of primary sources that were largely unknown to art historians (both in Spain and abroad), such as inventories, appraisals, estate partition documents, dowry receipts and wills. They contain new and valuable information on the wide variety of Chinese porcelains and other Asian goods that were imported into Spain and show how they were valued, used and displayed by the royalty, nobility, clergy, merchant class and other individuals in their respective palaces, ecclesiastic institutions or private households. Krahe's research methodology is to be praised, as she not only transcribed these documents and translated them into English, but also meticulously organized them in three documentary appendices for the reader.

The information gathered from these documents is complemented by an extensive analysis of the extant material evidence dating to the Habsburg period. This includes a few pieces of Chinese porcelain still found today in Spain (four of them remaining *in situ*), a considerably large quantity of shards of porcelains of various types and dates found in archaeological excavations throughout the country, and the porcelain salvaged from the Spanish galleon, the *San Diego*, which sank in Philippine waters in 1600. Including the latter in her research is not surprising, as Krahe was in charge of the catalogue of the recovered *San Diego* porcelain housed in the Naval Museum in Madrid.

To visually contextualize the Chinese porcelain imported into Habsburg Spain, Krahe includes a detailed identification of the porcelain pieces depicted in still-life and genre paintings by a number of different Spanish artists of the period. Although Krahe concludes her extensive study with the surprising fact that only a limited quantity of porcelain was actually imported at the time, and that the majority of it was acquired by the royalty, high-ranking society and wealthy merchants, the porcelains depicted in these paintings demonstrate that they were valued for both their beauty and rarity. A painting by Antonio de Pereda depicting a porcelain bell-shaped cup decorated in the so-called Transitional style, which, as noted by Krahe, has the rim damaged,

attests to the limited availability of porcelain in Spain (p. 269, fig. 209).

This well-documented and beautifully published book, offering new and much needed insight into these fascinating early commercial and cultural exchanges between China and Spain, will serve as a reference for art historians, historians, archaeologists and collectors of Chinese porcelain for years to come.

**Teresa Canepa**