



Chinese export porcelain small punchbowl with two fox scenes

Qianlong period circa 1790

European Market

Diameter: 11½ inches; 29cm

An extremely rare Chinese export porcelain bowl very finely painted with scenes of foxes, chickens and a swan in rouge-de-fer, the interior with a roundel of two phoenixes (fenghuang).

This late 18th century bowl has two scenes on it, one of a fox catching a rooster, watched by a hen with her chicks - and another with the fox caught in a trap with a startled swan and her cygnets nearby. This design has long been called the 'fables' pattern as it was thought to show an illustration from Aesop's Fables or those of La Fontaine. However the scenes don't appear to have a narrative and there is no fable that fits this pair of events.

The style appears closest to the work of the artist Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) who produced a range of drawings, engraved by Charles-Nicolas Cochin for an edition of Jean de la Fontaine's Fables Choisie, mis en vers, (1755-9). This is not from that edition, but looks similar. An image by Francis Barlow of a House-Dog and a Wolf from a 1667 edition of Aesop's fables is found on Chinese export porcelain and several images of Fables by La Fontaine are known on plates.

A large export punchbowl (circa 1790) with these two scenes in panels but with simpler vegetation, was sold at Christies New York in 2005, though that bowl had the 'Collapsed Hussar' scene in the centre. About fifteen years ago a pair of large oils on canvas, painted in grey with carved 18th century-style frames appeared at auction in Budapest, described as 'after Jean-Baptist Oudry'. They clearly show these exact scenes but it has not been possible to trace the originals by Oudry.

New research has since shown that these two images are taken from prints by Gilles Demarteau (1722-76) after a series of animal drawings by Charles Dagommer (c1700-c1768) and his pupil Jean-Baptiste Huet. Nos 22 and 23 in the series are these two scenes (see illustration) signed Dagommer.

The prints are in a technique called 'sanguine', imitating red chalk drawing, that was much used by Demarteau. This explains the unusual use of the iron red monochrome on the bowl.

References: Litzenburg 2003, p182, the Barlow image on a cup and saucer; a pair of Chinese export porcelain plaques are also known with these images; Locquin, Jean 1912, *Catalogue Raisonné de Jean Baptiste Oudry* (Pub: Paris, H Champion), No367, a picture of swans with young surprised by foxes, sold in 1875, No 779, a pastel study of a fox in a trap, sold 1773; No 332, a fox catching a rooster, with hen and chicks nearby, painted for M de Trudaine at the Château de Montigny, exhibited: 'Salon de 1748, No 25', similar to one in the Wallace Collection (CR 357) and another sold in 1777 in the Vente Conti (CR 364); Rijksmuseum Collection, Nos: RP-P-1928-176 & 177, the Demarteau prints.