

New Discoveries!

Many Chinese export porcelain items have specially commissioned 'European subject' designs, handpainted onto the porcelain in Jingdezhen or Canton by Chinese artists using prints and drawings supplied from Europe by the China trade supercargos and agents.

About a thousand such designs made over the long eighteenth century and for many of them the print source is unknown - despite patient searches by many researchers in this field over the years. This does not include armorial designs.

All that remains now is the porcelain. Almost always very rare, the designs may be known from only a few pieces, perhaps one teacup scattered among collectors, or just one punchbowl. Some are produced only once as special commissions and some more fashionable and commercially popular subjects are reproduced over a period with varying quality and different borders.

Most have been published and discussed in notable books: Hervouët & Bruneau 1986; Howard & Ayers 1978; books by Christiaan Jörg, William Sargent and others including Mezin 2002 and Litzenberg 2003, as well as the catalogues of dealers including Cohen & Cohen and the auction catalogues of some important collections otherwise unpublished (Binder; Garbisch; Miller; Popowich; Freylinghuisen among others). New and unrecorded examples surface from time to time.

Some designs have been wrongly described and others given suggestions that have proved off target. Many remain distinct and tricky mysteries. Incrementally the print sources have been found, as people with knowledge of the porcelain designs wade through print archives and 18th century illustrated books. In some cases a chance discovery is made while searching for something else.

Occasionally we will present a few of these new discoveries here - some relating to the rare porcelains that are offered for sale here, some to sold items and some to well known but rare items published in books by others. In a few cases the 'discovery' turns out to have been found by someone else and published obscurely - or not published at all. We would wish always to give credit where it is due - but in some cases a parallel serendipity may have resulted in 'duplicate discoveries'. If you have any information about this please let us know and we will happily credit your efforts here.

In the long term it is hoped to compile an online database of all such European subject designs, with design source attributions where known. From this it is hoped that the many experienced and educated 'eyes' out there in the fine & decorative arts fields may alight upon new attributions and help to fill in the gaps.

We will also highlight here some of the well known designs that have so far evaded researchers and remain frustratingly unattributed.

Will Motley



No 58, Punchbowl

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.

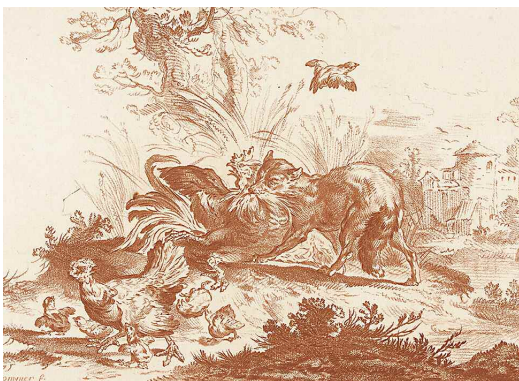
This design has been known as the 'fables' pattern as it was thought to show an illustration from Aesop's Fables or those of La Fontaine. However the scenes don't appear to have a narrative and there is no fable that fits this pair of events. They had been thought to be after works by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) because of a pair of grisaille oils on canvas that appeared

at auction in Budapest around 2001, which had been attributed as 'after Oudry'.

However the sources for this bowl have been found in two prints from a short suite by Gilles Demarteau (1729-1776) after designs by Charles Dagomer (died 1766). Demarteau was a pioneer of the 'sanguine' print technique in an orange red to imitate red chalk. Dagomer was a minor animal painter in Paris, a member of the *Académie de Saint-Luc* working in the 1760s, who trained Jean Baptiste Huet (1745-1811).

It is interesting that the unusual use of the iron red colouring on this bowl seems to be an attempt to copy this directly from the sanguine prints. The painting is of a very high quality in this example. Some larger bowls are known with oval panels with these designs, slightly later in date and with the 'Hussar' design in the centre of the bowl - an adaptation of a 1776 mezzotint 'The Wounded Hussar' by Valentine Green after George Carter.

Also recorded are two porcelain plaques with iron red decoration of similar scenes, one from the same print series by Dagomer and Demarteau. However the suite is extremely rare and no published complete set has been located, to examine comprehensively.



detail of print, circa 1770, by Gilles Demarteau after Charles Dagomer, Numbered 23
(Rijksmuseum, No RPP.1928-177)



detail of print, circa 1770, by Gilles Demarteau after Charles Dagomer, Numbered 22
(Rijksmuseum, No RPP.1928-176)



large punchbowl with the two scenes



*mezzotint 1776, The Wounded Hussar
by Valentine Green (1739-1813)
after George Carter (1737-1794)
Published by R Sayer & J Bennett
'The original picture in the collection of John
Willett Esq.'
(This print from a private collection)*