BLUE & WHITE

By Debi Raitz

As early as the Shang dynasty, 16th - 11th century BC, a white stoneware was made in China. Glazed "porcelain" is also found for the first time during this period.

Excavations in the early 20th century in the ruins of Samarra in Iraq unearthed a group of wares, mostly small dishes with simple decoration or inscriptions in cobalt on a soft tin glaze. These wares were technically little different from later European Maiolica and Delft. Since Samarra was built and occupied only between 836 AD and 892 AD then virtually abandoned, it can confidently be established that these wares date to the ninth century. The first identified use of cobalt blue on ceramics is probably that of the Tang dynasty blue glazed earthenware. It was introduced as early as the first half of the 8th century AD, disappeared with the fall of that dynasty, and was not reintroduced until after the Mongol invasion led by Kublai Khan in 1279. With that began the Yuan dynasty and the empire founded by his grandfather, Genghis Khan, now extended from Korea and the Chinese mainland across the deserts and grassy steppes of Central Asia to the Middle East and Europe, westward to the Danube River and Adriatic Sea. Within this colossal domain, all the barriers to trade and the exchange of ideas and scientific discoveries disappeared. Seaways and the long ago traveled "Silk Roads" reopened and travel into China was made easier. One of the most significant Western products introduced by Kublai Khan was a superior quality cobalt from Persia. No one knows exactly when, but sometime during the Yuan dynasty potters at Jingdezhen began to paint miniature pictures on their unfired clay vessels using that blue pigment. One name given it was *wu ming yu* which meant *nameless rarity*. The tradition of Chinese pottery restarted in the 14th century has continued with no major interruptions to the present day.

Persian merchants were the first to appreciate the blue and white Chinese porcelain and commissioned Chinese potters to adapt their designs to Persian tastes. Then with the Portuguese discovery of a sea route to China in the 16th century, the Europeans soon became their most demanding customers. Westerners were delighted by the exotic painting on the export wares but quickly became dissatisfied with the limited number of shapes available so they began sending samples and wooden models of tablewares. They sent tankards, bottles, candlesticks, flasks, mustard pots, and saltcellars to the Chinese to be copied.

Examples of Chinese Export Saltcellars

When tea drinking became fashionable, enormous numbers of teacups were ordered, first the Oriental handleless version, and later the one and two handled types. Chinese porcelain was bright and shiny. It was heat-resistant, easy to clean and impervious to liquids. It was harder than steel, yet brittle, and to the 17th century Europeans who were used to using earthenware and wooden plates, it was both a miracle and a mystery. The Chinese managed to keep the manufacture of porcelain a secret for over 1000 years. Merchants, missionaries, diplomats and travelers were deliberately misled about what they thought they saw at the places of porcelain manufacture. Porcelain got its name from Marco Polo. He called it PORCELLANE, which is Italian for *little pigs*. That's also the word used for cowrie shells that are white, translucent, and shiny like porcelain.

When the Portuguese and Dutch traders began to import blue and white porcelain in the 16th and 17th centuries, it became the yardstick with which to compare the wares of local potters. It stimulated production of blue and white

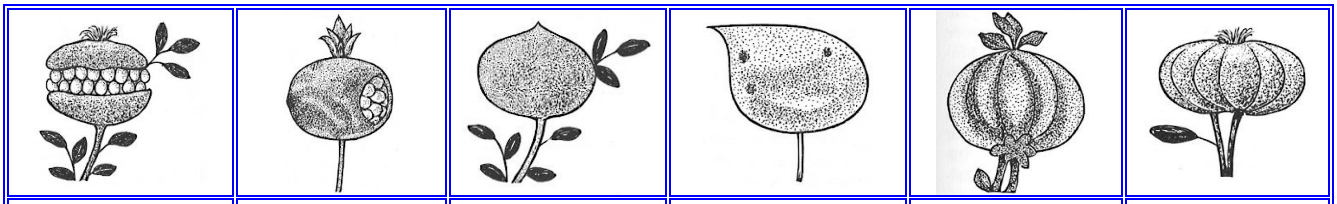
Delftware and to a lesser extent, the maiolica and faience in the rest of Europe. No European potteries could match the quality of porcelains from the Kangxi period of 1662-1722. Until the secret of porcelain making was discovered in 1708 by the German alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, everyone had to import their porcelain from China. In 1710 a royal factory was established at Meissen where Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland spared no expense to achieve the level of quality equal to that of his imported Chinese treasures. But only ten years after its discovery the secret of porcelain making slipped out of Meissen and rapidly spread over all of Europe. In 1723 the Royal Manufactory in Meissen found it necessary to introduce bottom marks to distinguish its products from those of other manufactories. Most other manufactories followed the Meissen example and began marking their own products with different marks. But within a few years the marks were imitated or copied, sometimes exact and sometimes with a slight change. There are over 200 legitimate crossed sword marks alone and many more copies that have been traced successfully to the “imitators.”

At first, Meissen produced copies of Chinese blue and white porcelain but it was not long before even the Chinese potters became adept at imitating its imitators. Today even an expert has difficulty in distinguishing between genuine Meissen and Chinese Meissen.

The most famous and most copied Meissen blue and white pattern is called BLUE ONION.

L to R: Unmarked Faience; RPM Meissen c.1774-1814; Franz Dorfl-Vienna-c.1902; RPM Meissen c.1840-1860

The name of the pattern actually resulted from a misunderstanding. The pomegranate that was one of the major motifs was interpreted as an onion. Every part of the pattern, every fruit and plant held its own special meaning. The chrysanthemum represented the melancholy of autumn. The pomegranate was regarded as a symbol of love and fertility. Peaches stood for immortality, while the bouquet of daisies and bamboo portrayed growth and time. So this pattern, which is so frequently believed to be German, is really Chinese in origin.



Chinese Pomegranate 1700-1730	Meissen Pomegranate 1728-1730	Chinese Peach 1700-1730	Meissen Peach 1728-1730	Chinese Bulb 1700-1730	Meissen Bulb 1730-1735

During the 18th century ceramics manufacturing developed from a craft into an important industry in Europe. Although the Chinese attempted to compete with the English products by imitating them, by the early 19th century English "china" had largely replaced Chinese export porcelain in western homes. The blue and white china most commonly seen today is transfer ware.

Transfer ware was a printing process begun in 1756 and developed by John Sadler and Guy Green of Liverpool. The first transfer ware process was called “bat printing” by which a pattern or design was etched onto a copper (or other metal) plate. A mixture of linseed oil and pulverized umber was then rubbed onto the engraved area using a soft cloth. The excess was wiped off by hand and a “bat “ was applied. A bat was a mixture of boiled glue and Barbadoes Tar (oil of turpentine), poured to a thickness of ¼ inch, and then cooled. This pliable bat was slowly peeled off the metal plate, picking up the design in oil, then carefully placed on the already once fired item. After the bat was slowly peeled from the item and left the oil behind, a ground, powdery color was lightly pounced on either by a soft cloth or through a muslin bag. Excess powder was removed and the ware was ready for refiring.

The change from glue bat to paper transfer printing was a gradual but inevitable one. Bat printing was a method used mainly on glazed china, thus requiring two firings. Transfer printing allowed under-glaze printing on earthenware. The transfer printing team, though more numerous, worked faster with the aid of a mechanical press. The bat printer worked alone, applying cold ink to bat and ware by hand. It was a slow process requiring considerable skill. In short, bat printing was a craft process while transfer printing was an industrial one. To complete the transition, a suitable

paper was first necessary, strong yet transparent when treated with liquid. There is no record of the trial and error necessary to achieve such a paper, but it was not until 1797 when William Adams built paper mills at Cheddleton that a supply was available locally. By 1815 the process of pottery manufacture had evolved to much like its modern state.

Modern day transfer printing involves a colored ink applied directly to the engraved plate and a special tissue is then applied to the plate to pick up the ink. Then the parts of the design are cut off the sheet of tissue and placed into position on the bisque item. The tackiness of the ink holds them in place as they are pounced down with stiff bushes for complete contact. Then the item is fired. Initially patterns were transferred to the ceramic items after glazing, but the ink often wore off, thus "underprinting" was born. Transfer items have a crisp, almost decal look about them. Upon close inspection, you can often find the place where the pattern doesn't quite match.

Transfer printing was developed in response to a call by English consumers for less expensive, mass produced wares. Customers desired the blue and white china, but only the most affluent could afford complete dinnerware sets since every piece had to be carefully handpainted by an artisan. This was a labor intensive and costly process. Transfer printing allowed hundreds of sets of dinnerware to be produced in a fraction of the time it would have taken to hand paint these items, and for a fraction of the cost. Transfer printing was originally produced in one-color items only. Some time later the technology was developed to allow double or triple color transfers. This meant that the rim of a plate may be one color and the center design may be another. Another method of embellishment was that a single color transfer item might be hand painted inside the confines of the design like petals and leaves and then glazed. This was called "clobbering". It is speculated that clobbering was developed in response to the cry by out of work artisans who had been replaced by transfer printing. Later a process called polychrome was used. This produced very bright almost enameled looking colors with a high glaze.

"Clobbering" is adding color by hand over a transfer.

"Polychrome" Enamel-like finish

Single color transfers are found in many hues of blue, red sometimes called pink, black called jet, brown often called sienna, purple or mulberry, and green. More rare are yellow transfers. Brown is common and the least expensive. Blue is the most sought after color and tends to be the most expensive.

Blue

Red or Pink

Black or Jet

Brown or Sienna

Purple or Mulberry

Green

Perhaps the most well known transfer pattern is BLUE WILLOW. Many variations exist.

L to R: English condiment set with unidentified mark reads “Old Willow Pattern Made in England;” individual pedestal marked “Miss Cranston” was used in the famous English tearoom of the same name; an unmarked pedestal master, probably English by shape; and an unmarked round, handled individual is probably Japanese in origin.

"Flow Blue" is also transfer ware and was originally a mistake. The cobalt pigment in the decorative glaze could not withstand the heat of the second firing and ran. Thus Flow Blue pieces have that runny, blurry quality about them. While initially this was a manufacturing error, Flow Blue is the most popular transfer ware today.

Example of Flow Blue

Landing of Lafayette by Clews

Transfer designs are varied and wide. Oriental patterns with scenes of Asian people and pagodas were quite popular. The romantic scenes are probably the most identifiable with a Victorian woman and perhaps a suitor by her side, often in gardens or gazebo settings. Commemorative wares depict scenes of historical significance, like royal coronations or the launching of ships. Pastoral items include scenes of rural life and farm animals. Then there are the floral items and the novelty or juvenile items. Juvenile items were often developed in miniatures or children's sets. Dating and identifying items can be easy if the items are registered under the English system. The registration process was similar to the copyright system used today in the United States. From 1842-1883 English items carried a diamond shaped mark. After 1884 the registry went to a single number series with numbers greater than 360,000 indicating 20th century manufacture. Other marks can be printed, impressed or incised, stamped, or hand-painted. Transfer items are still produced today. In fact, some manufacturers like Spode have re-released some old patterns, particularly blue and white ones.

There were, of course, other makers of blue and white china and open salts throughout the 19th century besides the Chinese exports, Meissen manufactories and English transfer ware. But keep in mind that open salts were losing favor by the beginning of the 20th century and being replaced by shakers. There are several other very identifiable blue and white types and patterns. There is the Dutch Delftware; there is the French faience; there is the Japanese handpainted china dips; there is Denmark's Royal Copenhagen just to name a few.

More recent examples of Dutch "Delft" including a reproduction of a very early one on the far right.

FRENCH FAIENCE - L to R: Double with an unidentified CA mark; round Quimper individual; trencher style with Gien mark of 1875-1935; footed midsize signed "Galle Nancy" of art glass fame; double signed "B & C Cie."

MADE IN JAPAN – L to R: Round with Japanese symbol mark; tub shape with Phoenix Bird pattern; small footed with Flying Turkey pattern; unmarked pedestal; small footed marked "Nippon;" Blue Onion pattern in light blue.

DENMARK –Several of the many made by Royal Copenhagen

DENMARK – Open salts by Bing & Grondohl

GERMAN – L to R: Stamped with R S Prussia mark; KPM scepter and globe mark; stamped with "Villeroy and Boch" logo; Tettau c.1885 "T" mark; unidentified blue crossed sword mark.

JASPERWARE – L to R: Coat of arms salt marked "Adams Estbs. 1657 Tunstall England"; Wedgwood coronation commemorative shows Philip on one side and Elizabeth on the other, marked "Wedgwood Made in England 1953" with additional initials; marked "Wedgwood Embossed Queensware Made in England"; same as second salt; marked "Dudson Brothers Hanley England."

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ENAMEL EXAMPLES – L to R: Bilston or Battersea is cobalt with raised white and gold decoration; pedestal from Norway is gold washed with blue guilloche enamel and a glass insert; tiny Russian on collar base with intricate enamel design; unmarked enamel with blown glass insert said to be French champleve; low round cobalt enamel has applied decorations then covered with brittle clear substance, possibly glass.

GLASS EXAMPLES – A selection of glass that fits nicely in a blue and white collection.

OTHER EXAMPLES – L to R: A variety of other materials includes red ware; polished blue Tiger Eye stone; yellow ware pedestal master with cobalt seaweed decoration; simple blue glazed pottery marked “Upchurch”; Irish Belleek coral salt with pale blue flowers painted instead of the more common practice of painting the raised coral, signed by artist M. Thomas.