

7. White Porcelanous Lobed Bowl

Diameter: 16.0 cm. (6 3/8 in.)

Height: 5.7 cm. (2 1/4 in.)

Tang dynasty

7th century A.D.

The bowl opens like a flower from a low, wide foot, the relatively straight sides slanting outward to a slightly everted and thickened mouth rim cut with four notches to create a lobate or foliate shape. A thin raised rib extends from each notch halfway down the interior of the bowl to further enhance the floral form. The foot has a square-cut broad rim surrounding the recessed base. The bowl is covered, aside from some areas on the foot and base, as well as on the cleanly wiped foot rim, with a satiny smooth, lustrous glaze of soft white color. The ware is compact, fine grained and pure white.



Among the watersheds in Chinese ceramic history, and the ceramic history of the world as well, was the invention of a high-fired white ware. This occurred in northern China beginning sometime during the 6th century A.D. Gongxian in Henan province and two centers in southern Hebei province, Xingzhou and Dingzhou, were the major areas of white ware production by the Tang dynasty. Although the characteristics of the various production sites have been addressed by Chinese archaeologists and ceramic specialists, it is often not possible for even them to attribute a piece to one or the other sites with confidence. A bowl from a Tang dynasty tomb in Xingtai city in Hebei province, for example, is noted as “attributed” Xing ware” (fig. 1). Sometimes attributions are “either” “or,” which indicates how close to each other these products could be. It was, however, the wares of the Xing kilns that appeared at that time to be at the forefront and so captured the imagination of poets and the affection of tea specialists that pre-Song white wares are often simply referred to as Xing or Xing type regardless of their actual places of production.

The inception of white ware corresponded with a fluorescence of Buddhist sculpture in the north; the white marble of the carvers and the white clay of the potters were intimately related. The white ceramic wares created during the period of the Northern Dynasties, corresponding to the Six Dynasties period of the south, also had an affinity with sculptural styles. Such motifs as lotus petals, florets, and medallions, for example, associated in our minds with art expressive of the Buddhist faith, were applied to ceramics that could be quite ornate and even sculptural in appearance. An opposite line or style developed, exemplified by the present bowl, wherein purity and serenity were the hallmarks providing the magic that attracted the attention of a discerning audience and caused them to receive lasting adulation.

A somewhat smaller but otherwise identical bowl was published in the catalogue of an exhibition at the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware (figs. 2-3). That bowl was described as having abrasions on the interior that had resulted from the whisking of tea. In the 8th century A.D., Lu Yu (A.D. 733-804) wrote the *Chajing*, or the “Classic of Tea,” the first text devoted entirely to tea and tea drinking, and every specific associated with the world of tea. The white ware of Xingzhou and the celadons of Yuezhou were pointed out as being the only wares from which tea should be consumed, elevating ceramics among the intelligentsia as they had never been before. Archaeological investigations over the last few decades have

revealed the extraordinary complexity of paraphernalia used at all levels of preparation and service during this first tea-drinking rage, when the present bowl was made and, we trust, used to advantage.



Fig. 1: White porcelanous bowl, Tang dynasty, 7th century A.D., attributed to the Xing kilns, excavated from a Tang dynasty tomb in Xingtai city, Hebei province, Palace Museum, Beijing, after *Zhongguo qutu ciqu quanji*, vol. 3 (Hebei), Beijing, 2008, pl. 31, p. 31.



Fig. 2: White porcelanous bowl, Tang dynasty 7th century A.D., after *Ancient Chinese Tea Wares*, Hong Kong, 1994, no. 8, p. 55.