



An Underglaze-blue Porcelain Dish with Deer Design

青青鹿紋菊花形瓷盤

Diameter: 20.3 cm. (8 in.)

Height: 3.4 cm. (1 3/8 in.)

Late Ming dynasty

Late 16th-early 17th century

The small, thinly potted dish was wheel thrown and pressed over a mould to produce a double row of multiple lobes or flutes in the cavetto, the lip rim finished with gentle scallops corresponding to the fluting, the wide flat base enclosed within a low v-shaped slightly inturned foot, the unglazed foot rim with a modicum of grit adhering and with some fritting to the lip rim. The focus of the design is a pair of deer within a loosely executed landscape of vague hillocks and foliage. One deer turns its head back as it moves forward, gazing at the second deer following behind, the bright cobalt blue brushed on in fluid washes, consistent in color throughout, the motifs enhanced with lineament, in places as brief outlines, in others as decorative or descriptive curved or straight comb-like lines. The flutes were each further defined with pencil-thin outlines and each completed with a thick blue stripe down its center. A double line circles the exterior of the foot while a loose scroll circles the foot at the base of the exterior wall. The glaze is clear, smooth and bright.

The motifs are more suggestive than realistic or naturalistic, more hastily than carefully produced, not atypical of small dishes and vessels made for export as well as domestic use during the late Ming period. The brilliant blue seen here, however, is most usually associated with much of China's ware made for export rather than the dull grey-blue of the domestic pedestrian wares. The two principal underglaze-blue decorated porcelains exported during the late Ming are known as *kraak* and *kosometsuke*: the first associated with lands west of China, the second with the east. *Kraak* is the Dutch moniker derived from the Portuguese "carrack," the shipping vessels that were the means of transporting the ceramics to the West while *kosometsuke* is the Japanese term, "old blue-decorated" ware, for the porcelains that were imported by the Japanese.

We have found two examples almost identical to the present dish: one published as *kraak* ware and the second as *kosometsuke*.¹ Shards of similar dishes have been recovered from a 16th-century ship that went down off the coast of South Africa and in Spanish colonies in Mexico and in Spanish-occupied Peru and Argentina, within the world of *kraak* export, and importantly at the late Ming Shibaqiao kiln site at Jingdezhen, which was a site of *kosometsuke* production.² At the extremes of their stylistic expressions the *kraak* and *kosometsuke* are worlds apart. iconic *kosometsuke* style is that in which pieces were purposefully made to look imperfect, spontaneous, irregular, natural.....all that the Japanese were drawn to, an

aesthetic that was exclusively theirs, and invariably the ceramics of sizes and sometimes prescribed shapes destined for tea ceremony use. *Kraak* derives essentially from Chinese compositions of the Yuan period, a heyday of export to the Islamic world, with paneling a primary compositional tool and tailored during the late Ming period for their clients: for example, large platters for the Middle East; small dishes, plates, cups and flasks for Europe and elsewhere.

Within the overall production and stock for each of these wares are types that are far less extreme and which share elements of shape, design, motif, and painting style, as well as such technical features as thin walls, light-weight bodies, with grit on the foot rims and fritting of the lip rims. The fluting of the cavettos resulting in what has sometimes been described as "chrysanthemum" form is also not foreign to either. As we struggle to pigeonhole the dish according to the non-Chinese nomenclatures we use, to the Chinese then, and for the most part now, the porcelains are simply blue-decorated wares, and apart from what we have called iconic wares, the markets were not exclusive.

1. For the piece identified as *kraak*, see Teresa Canepa, *Jingdezhen to the World: the Lurie Collection of Chinese export Porcelain from the Late Ming Dynasty*, Paul Hoberton, London, 2019, no. 38, p. 130 and 131. For that identified as *kosometsuke*, see

Kawahara Masahiko, *Ko-sometsuke*, vol. II, black & white plates, Kyoto: Kyoto Shoin, 1977, pl. 620, p. 157.

2. See Canepa, pp. 130-131 and Cao

Jianwen, "Ko-sometsuke and Shonzui Wares for the Japanese Market Discovered in Kiln Sites of Jingdezhen in Recent Years," *The Oriental Ceramic Society Newsletter*, no. 17, May 2019, p. 6.