

Two Generous Bequests to the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge,

Oscar Raphael's Song Ceramics and Sir Reginald Corey's Imperial Qing Porcelain

I last visited the Fitzwilliam Museum in March 2019 and walking through the galleries, I was struck by the variety and quality of the exhibits. On closer examination, it became clear that the museum had benefitted from the bequests of two English collectors who were active in the first half of the 20th century - Oscar Raphael (1874-1941) and Sir Reginald Radcliffe Cory (1871-1934).



Fig 1. Entrance to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Both collectors had split their bequests between the British and Fitzwilliam Museums. In the case of Oscar Raphael, he gave just general guidelines for this and was to let the museums work out the details. Raphael wanted to see that the collections would be placed in the context where they would be most appropriate and give the most pleasure. ¹ However, this is where the similarity ends, as Oscar Raphael's collecting interest were very wide and covered Islamic art, Japanese prints, paintings, netsuke, inro and other lacquer, as well as early and later Chinese jades, archaic bronzes, Song, Yuan and Ming ceramics. Cory's collecting was much more focused on 18th century imperial Qing enamelled wares, but he did also collect snuff bottles and Japanese inro. His collection amounted to around 1,200 items at his death.

The wide and varied collections at the Fitzwilliam are partly due to the director, Sir Sydney Cockerell (1867-1962) who had the practice of bringing in experts and hiring them as honorary keepers. This was the case with Raphael, who also acted as a voluntary assistant keeper at the British Museum. Raphael also acted as advisor to Cockerell on Cory's bequest in 1934 and helped the Museum acquire some the finest pieces from the collection.

Raphael himself was to leave half of his archaic bronze collection to the Fitzwilliam, as well as around 125 pieces of pottery and porcelain. The latter was especially strong in wares from the Song dynasty, which will be part of the focus of this article. ² He was also to leave the Museum some pieces of Korean celadon, along with the majority of his Near Eastern collection and also a selection of items from his Japanese, Egyptian and Ancient Persian holdings. ³

The individual highlights of the two bequests will be examined separately and the monochrome stonewares of the Song dynasty and the polychrome enamelled porcelain wares of the Qing dynasty form an interesting contrast when examined together and it is clear that these two bequests greatly strengthened the holdings of the Fitzwilliam's Chinese collection.

Oscar Raphael was the son of a gold bullion trader and was a founder member and once President of the Oriental Ceramics Society, which was formed in 1921. He was also on the organising committee of the 1935-1936 International Exhibition of Chinese Art at the Royal Academy. Lady David described him as being a personal friend and said that Sir Percival David had valued his opinion and considered him to have one of the best eyes of the collectors of that era. ⁴ He was a client of Bluett's from 1920 until his death and also of the other major dealers, Sparks, Spink & Son, C.T. Loo and Yamanaka and Tonying.

The use of purple copper splashes in this Junyao circular dish (Fig 2.) is particularly successful and a number of these look as though they have been applied to the rim and allowed to run into the

surface of the interior. The two-tone effect is very effective and on close examination, there are lighter tones within the purple splashes which appear to be the result of a chemical reaction at the surface, which may have resulted during the cooling of the piece during the firing.

There are five areas of gilt-lacquer repair to the rim, which is a favoured Japanese restoration technique. Rather than hiding the damage, their view was to make a highlight of the repair by using gold - a precious material that reflected the importance placed upon the piece.

This Yaozhou meiping vase (Fig 3.) is a particularly rare example and the shorter, truncated form is more commonly found. It would have most likely been thrown in two pieces and luted together around the shoulder. There is a linear division between the carved decoration at the shoulder, to the rest of the body.



Fig 2. A Junyao circular dish, Northern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.

It is carved with meandering stems of peony which become cleverly abstracted into the general outline of petals and leaves, which creates the impression of a mass of flowers. Most of the petals are 'combed' with a linear tool which traps a small amount of extra glaze. This creates a slightly darker tone and gives the impression that the petals/leaves are slightly bending.

This glaze pooling effect is also created on the outlines of the petals, where the potter has carved these with a knife at an angle. The deepest incision is made at the edge of the petal, which helps to create the suggestion of the form. This glaze effect can also be seen on a Yaozhou dish in the collection, but here the design is conceived in much greater detail. (Fig 4.) The flowers and leaves are clearly defined which creates a more balanced and dynamic effect.

The flat, circular 'picture' surface of dishes and bowls worked well for these designs and another

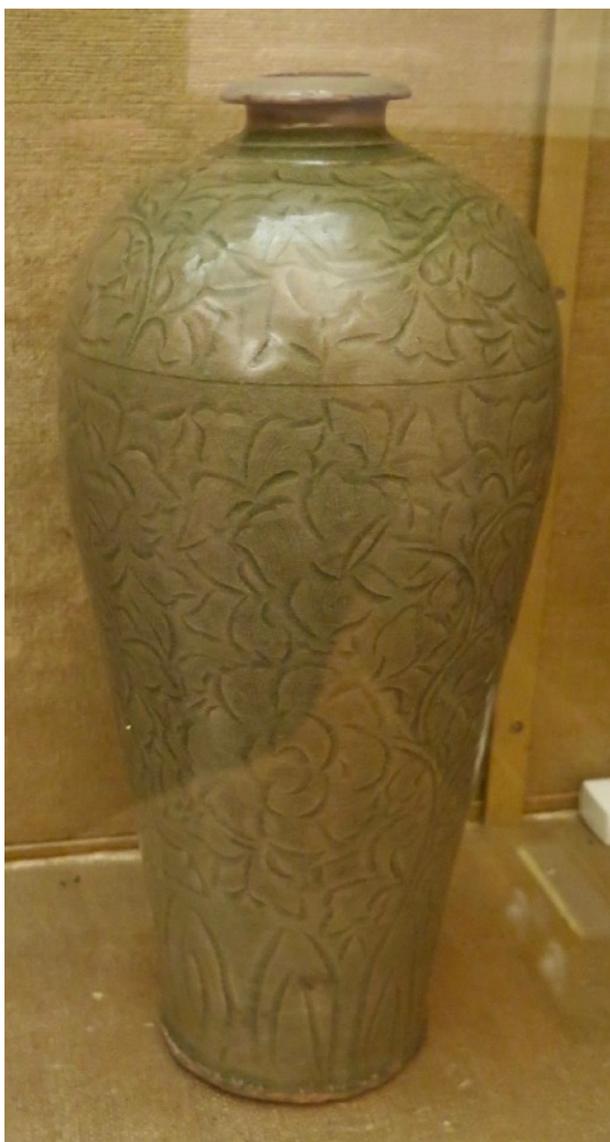


Fig 3. A Yaozhou 'peony' meiping vase, Northern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.
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Fig 4. A Yaozhou circular 'peony' dish, Northern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 5. A Yaozhou 'peony' dish, Northern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.

dish in the collection illustrates how well the artist has conceived the design within this circular format. (Fig 5.) Additionally, the rolled rim in this example acts as a successful framing device.

A similar free carving approach to designs was employed at this time at the Ding kilns at Jiancicun in Hebei province. (Fig 6.) However, the decoration, in this case of lotus, does not fill quite so much of the surface area as the Yaozhou examples. There is also less tonal effects from the glaze and carving, as the glaze is of a much lighter, tone.

The spontaneity of its carving and the translucent pale ivory glaze has contributed to this high fired porcelaneous stoneware being highly sought after amongst Chinese collectors.



Fig 6. A Dingyao 'lotus' dish, Northern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.

Due to economic expediency, Ding dishes and bowls were generally fired upside down on their rims, as a greater number could be arranged in clay saggars. Metal wire was then applied to the rim after firing to give the unglazed edge greater protection.

Another aid to mass production was developed in the later Northern Song/early Jin dynasty, which was the use of moulds. (Fig 7.) The mould was carved in detail into the unfired stoneware clay and then fired hard. Designs could then be easily achieved by laying a thrown vessel over the mould and applying pressure.

Designs made in this way could therefore be achieved much more quickly than through carving. (Fig 8.)



Fig 7. A stoneware mould, with lotus and Mandarin duck design, Jin dynasty, K. S. Lo Collection, Hong Kong.

The main recognisable difference is that the linear elements of the design, such as outlines, now stood in relief, which made them quite distinguishable from carved examples.

This technique also allowed for more detailed and sophisticated designs, however the spontaneity created by the free-form carving was compromised with this technique.

The last two pieces to be looked at in this bequest rely only on their shape and colour, through the effects of their glaze. The first is the Jian ware teabowl from Fujian province. (Fig 9.) This 'oil spot' glaze consists of brown bubbles on a shiny black ground. The effects of this glaze technique is highly unusual and would have been a pleasant accident in the kiln, which would have been almost impossible to reproduce. This bowl has the number seven (*chi*) cut into its base.



Fig 8. A moulded Dingyao 'lotus and fish' dish, Jin dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.

The Longquan celadon mallet or '*kinuta*' vase has two phoenix-shaped handles (Fig 10.) The Japanese name translates as mallet, but also refers to examples with the best pale turquoise-green coloured glaze. Longquan celadons were fired in large 'dragon' kilns where hundreds of pieces were fired at once. The glaze colour varied depending on where it was fired in the kiln, with the best effects being achieved further away from the fire which allowed for slow heating and cooling.

Sir Reginald Radcliffe Cory (1871–1934) was the third son of John Cory (1828–1910), who had established



Fig 9. A Jian 'oil spot' bowl, Southern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum. 4.



Fig 10. A Longquan celadon '*kinuta*' vase, Southern Song dynasty. Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 11. Dyffryn House, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales. Photograph © National Trust.

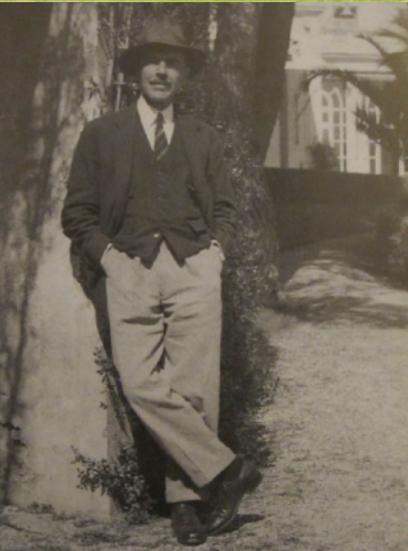


Fig 12. Sir Reginald Radcliffe Cory (1871-1934) Photograph © National Trust.

successful shipping and coal exporting businesses. He was to inherit the Dyffryn House from his father and also became a successful entrepreneur in the business.

Cory's first love was horticulture and he was to develop the gardens at Dyffryn with an arboretum. He was to sponsor a number of international plant collecting expeditions, as the late 19th to early 20th century was one of the great eras of plant discovery and acquisition. Cory's reputation and influence was such that he became a leading council member of both the Royal Horticultural Society and the Linnaean Society. 5.

In terms of his Chinese collecting interest, this was, as mentioned, quite different to Raphael, as he was to focus primarily on 18th century imperial enamel wares. At his death in 1934, a number of pairs were split between the Fitzwilliam and the British Museums and below examples from the latter have been illustrated alongside the ones from the former.

Looking at Cory's collection, it does appear that his interest in botany was partly reflected in the ceramics that he chose for his collection, where many of his subjects were of fruit and flowers, sometimes accompanied by birds and butterflies.

This large Qianlong period (1736-1795) famille rose *tianqiuping* (celestial sphere) vase is a perfect, large format to display the twisting gnarled branches of a peach tree with its burgeoning fruit and flowers. These are painted in opaque pink, yellow and white enamels, which allowed the painter to create tonal gradations of colour and thus greater three dimensional effects.

This is in contrast to the the green and turquoise leaves which employ

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Fig 13. A Qianlong mark and period famille rose 'peach' vase, tianqiuping, British Museum. Photograph © British Museum.



Fig 14. A Qianlong mark and period famille rose 'peach' vase, tianqiuping, Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 16. A Qianlong mark and period famille rose 'peach and bat' bowl, British Museum. Photograph © British Museum.

thinner translucent washes of colour and black outlines to suggest their form.

An interesting adaptation to this design can be seen on bowls of this period, where the majority of the design is painted horizontally to the exterior. The open form of the bowl allowed the painter to continue the design into the interior by extending the branches over the rim. These bowls usually include five iron-red bats, which symbolise good fortune. Three are painted to the exterior and two to the interior.

The quality of the painting of the Yongzheng famille rose twin peony dish (Fig 16.) is exceptional and combines perfectly with the delicately potted chrysanthemum flower shape and the crisp white ground that has been created from a highly refined porcelain.

The painting of the white peony, is quite subtle and combines delicate use of pink enamel at the flower edges and yellow enamel for the pistils. This technique is also used on the white flowers on the later (Qianlong period) peach vase. The companion peony on this dish is painted in a translucent matt iron-red enamel. Here a sense of three dimensionality is created by adding more layers of wash to the inner parts of the flower, to give a darker tone, that graduates to a lighter one at the petal's extremities.

The shape and direction of the budding flower branches creates a sense of circular movement that is echoed in the leaves to the lower left of the dish.



Fig 15. A Qianlong mark and period 'peach' bowl, Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 16. A Yongzheng mark and period famille rose 'peony' dish, Fitzwilliam Museum. 6.



Fig 17. A Yongzheng mark and period famille rose 'peony' dish, British Museum. Photograph © British Museum.



Fig 18. A Yongzheng mark and period famille rose dish depicting a scholar rising from a table. Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 19. A Kangxi mark and period famille verte 'Birthday' dish, depicting a bird. Fitzwilliam Museum.



Fig 19. A Qianlong mark and period doucai vase and cover. Fitzwilliam Museum.

The Yongzheng mark and period (1723-1735) famille rose dish (Fig 18.) is a sensitive portrayal of a scholar official at the moment that he has risen from his desk and is adjusting his robes. A level of intimacy in this scene is created between the subject and the viewer by the large areas of unpainted white ground, where there is little else to distract the viewer.

The Kangxi mark and period (1662-1722) 'Birthday' dish by contrast has quite a detailed diaper border surrounding the bird on the fruiting branch. There are also four panels of characters reading *ten thousand years of longevity without end*. These dishes were commissioned to commemorate the Kangxi Emperor's 60th birthday in 1714 and subjects vary from Mandarin ducks on lotus ponds, to standing geese and birds on branches.



Fig 20. A Kangxi mark and period famille verte 'Birthday' dish, depicting a bird. British Museum. Photograph © British Museum.

The last piece to be examined is the small doucai baluster vase and cover. It is painted in a formalised design of stylised lotus between bands of lappets at the foot and *ruyi*-shaped panels at the shoulder. The doucai technique employs the use of overglaze enamels to fill in the underglaze cobalt blue outlines of the design which was created at the first firing. There is also the addition of gilded outlines, which is quite unusual and would have required the piece to have been fired a third time. The resulting effect is somewhat sumptuous and is further highlighted with two large iron-red and gilt lion-mask handles at the shoulder.

The bequests of these two important English collectors was to greatly enrich the collections of the Fitzwilliam and British Museums. By both having the means and fortuitous timing, they were able to collect at a time when these pieces were readily available and relatively inexpensive. By their keen collectors instinct, their eye and philanthropic foresight, we have all become the beneficiaries of their actions today.

Notes

1. Gray, Basil, *The Oscar Raphael Collection For the Nation*, Burlington Magazine, Nov 1945, Vol. 87, No. 512, p. 276.
2. Davids, Roy, Jellinek, Dominic, *Provenance, Collectors, Dealers & Scholars in Britain & America*, 2011, p. 369.
3. Cornucopia, *Discovering UK Collections, The Oscar Raphael Collection*.
4. *Op cit* Davids, Jellinek, p. 369.
5. Toomer, Simon, *Who was Reginald Cory*, The National Trust, Dyffryn Gardens.

