ARS DECORATIVA 34

Museum of Applied Arts



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CONTENTS

Zsombor JÉKELY: The Budapest Drawing of the Fonthill Vase / **7**

Szilveszter TERDIK: A Lesser-known Miniature Carving
in the Collection of the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest / **21**

Edit DARABOS: „Futteralen über Löffel, Messer und Gabel von Silber…"
Bestecketuis aus dem 18. Jahrhundert im Kunstgewerbemuseum Budapest / **33**

Hilda HORVÁTH: Vom „Herzog Bob" bis zum Krug von Urbino.
Das Leben und die Sammlung von Károly Bakonyi / **67**

Zsuzsa MARGITTAI: Children's Book from Here and Beyond –
Hungarian Illustrators Abroad in the First Half of the 20th Century:
Willy Pogany and Miska Petersham / **83**

Zsuzsa MARGITTAI: The Museum of Applied Arts in 2019 / **103**

ZSOMBOR JÉKELY

THE BUDAPEST DRAWING OF THE FONTHILL VASE

The so-called Fonthill Vase (sometimes also called the Gaignières-Fonthill Vase), preserved today at the National Museum of Ireland, is generally regarded as the oldest well-documented Chinese porcelain object surviving in Europe.[1] (*Fig. 1*) Unrecognized for a long time, the vase has been in Dublin since 1882. Its history, however, can be traced back to the 14th-century thanks to a 17th-century drawing documenting its splendid Gothic mounting.[2] Although the importance of the Fonthill Vase has been recognized for a long time, a lot of confusion still surrounds its true history. In the present paper I intend to summarize the results of decades of research dedicated to the vase and I would also like to call attention to a hitherto largely neglected document of its history.



1. The Fonthill Vase*, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, DC: 1882.3941*



2. The Fonthill Vase*, with the hole drilled for the spout, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, DC: 1882.3941*

Today the Fonthill Vase survives without its European mounting. The vase itself is a bottle-shaped white porcelain object, with relief decoration on the sides and a light-green glaze (so-called Qingbai glaze). Produced in Jingdezhen, it dates from the Yuan-period (1271–1368) and is usually dated to the first half of the 14th century within that period. A hole at the bottom of the neck indicates that it was transformed from a vase into an ewer: the spout was attached at this spot. (*Fig. 2*) It is a type of porcelain vessel which, although not very common, was known in Europe during the late Middle Ages. Western museum collections, such as the British Museum or the Victoria and Albert Museum preserve several analogous objects, some of them also mounted in Europe.[3] (*Fig. 3*) As Qingbai glaze largely went out of fashion with the spread of blue and white porcelain in the 15th century, it is generally assumed that these examples also arrived to Europe during the Middle Ages. A related object, the so-called Marco Polo Vase at the treasury of San Marco in Venice reputedly was brought home by Marco Polo – although this cannot be fully substantiated, it is also not impossible.[4]



3. Chinese porcelain vase, so-called yuchuchun ping, The British Museum, London, 1961,1021.1

Chinese porcelain objects were very rare in Europe before the 16th century, and when they arrived, they became prized objects in treasuries.[5] Among the most famous collections from this period is that of Lorenzo de' Medici: his porcelain objects filled a cupboard and his interest in porcelain is also documented by the gift of two large porcelain vases sent by the Sultan of Cairo.[6] The secret of making the fine, hard, shiny and white material of porcelain was not known in Europe in those days – so porcelain objects were treated similar to precious stones and rock crystal and were generally set in silver gilt mounts. The earliest such surviving object is the so-called Katzenelnbogen Cup, from the middle of the 15th century, preserved in the Kassel Museum today.[7] Other similar pieces are mostly only known from inventories.

The European history of the Fonthill Vase can be reconstructed thanks to an early-eighteenth-century drawing, which shows the vase in an elaborate late medieval silver-gilt and enamel mount. The coat of arms found on the mount enable us both to determine the date and place of its manufacture and help us trace the later history of the object through inventories. The illustration survives as part of the Gaignières Collection now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.[8] (*Fig. 4*) The drawing has



4. Drawing of the Fonthill Vase *in the Gaignières Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, FR 20070*

been published by Fernand Mazerolle in 1897, who stated that it represents the earliest documented Chinese porcelain object which was set in a mount in Europe.[9] The fact that the drawing shows the vase now preserved in Dublin was recognized by Arthur Lane, in a highly influential article published in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1961.[10] Today, if we look at the object information of the National Museum of Ireland, or if we open any standard reference books on Chinese porcelain in Europe (specifically mounted porcelain), we find the following story about the vase:

The vase originally entered Europe through Hungary, and was in the possession of Hungary's Anjou ruler, Louis the Great (1342–1382). The vase is thought to have come to Hungary in 1338 as a gift from a group of Nestorian Christians traveling from China to Avignon to meet Pope Benedict XII. It was definitely in Hungary by 1381, when Louis the Great gave it to Charles III, the future king of Naples (r. 1382–1386), at which time it was mounted.[11] This oft-repeated story is based on an analysis of the heraldic decoration of the mounts, elements of which were first proposed by Mazerolle in 1897 and were then further elaborated by Lane in 1961. However, every part of this story is unsubstantiated or plainly false. This was most recently pointed out in the catalogue of the 2016 exhibition on Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, held at the National Gallery of Prague and later in Nuremberg. The vase from Dublin was on display along with the watercolour from Paris – and the objects were described in the catalogue by Filip Suchomel.[12] There however, this story was replaced with another fantastic story, suggesting that the vase may have entered Europe through the missionary trip of Giovanni de' Marignolli and was given to Charles IV in Prague, who later gifted it to the Duke of Berry in 1377. The basis for this theory is thin – the most important argument to support it is a claim that Emperor Charles IV liked exotic objects. Suchomel traces the route of the vase to the Duke of Berry (in 1416, in the inventory upon his death a Chinese porcelain vase was mentioned) and from there, to Queen Johanna II of Naples, who had the mount made.[13] Overall, this story is just as unsubstantiated – even its author acknowledges that it is not supported by any sources, so it is just a hypothesis.

It is very peculiar that these unsubstantiated narratives keep circulating about this

special object – especially because the true story of the Fonthill Vase has already been reconstructed securely. Two noted ceramic historians of Hungarian origin have published key studies on the Fonthill Vase, clarifying the meaning of the heraldic decoration of the mounts and thus elucidating the European history of the object. Unfortunately, these publications have largely escaped the attention of historians of oriental ceramics, which is understandable given their place of publication.

First in 1969, Béla Krisztinkovich dedicated an important study to the Fonthill Vase. Unfortunately, his study was only published in Hungarian although in the main academic journal of art history in Hungary.[14] In 1967, the study of Arthur Lane was published in *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* in Hungarian translation, and Krisztinkovich responded to that publication in the same journal.[15] Maybe he was also planning an English-language publication of the study as well but as he passed away at the end of 1969, he could not complete it. Lane himself had already passed in 1963, so already the Hungarian-language publication of his study was posthumous. Krisztinkovich called attention to the fact that the heraldry of the mounts refers not to the Hungarian Angevin rulers, but to the Neapolitan Angevins. Although this had little response in scholarship in general, Hungarian publications at least ceased to refer to the object as the Ewer of King Louis the Great – as it was famously called by Dezső Dercsényi in his 1941 monograph on the ruler.[16] In a second, more detailed study, Jenő Horváth surveyed the history of the vase again – refuting once and for all its connection with the Hungarian royal court.[17] Jenő Horváth emigrated to Canada after 1956 – and it should be noted that he was married to Mária Krisztinkovich, so he inherited the subject from his father in law. His study, published in 1986, came to light in a New York-based publication of historical studies dedicated to King Louis the Great, in the series of East European Monographs. Again, this was not the kind of publication that researchers of oriental ceramics would notice. Based on historical data analysed by Krisztinkovich and Horváth, the true history of the Fonthill Vase can be reconstructed as follows:

As stated above, the vase was manufactured in Jingdezhen in the first half of the 14th century. It is not known when and how it travelled to Europe – but it most likely came via Silk Road and the maritime trade routes in the Mediterranean. In any case, it must have arrived to the Angevin Kingdom of Naples. There is no indication whatsoever that prior to that it would have been in the Kingdom of Hungary or in Prague. In Naples, it was certainly not the only such object: the first ever European reference to Chinese porcelain objects also survives from Naples, in the will of Queen Mary from 1323.[18] Similarly, the earliest European archaeological finds of porcelain come from Southern Italy, from the castle of Lucera. These fragments date from the 13th century, probably already from the Angevin period. Lucera was an important settlement of Muslims who were exiled from Sicily by Emperor Frederick II – their colony was finally massacred by the troops of Charles II Anjou in 1300.[19]

The heraldic decoration on the mount of the Fonthill Vase securely ties it to the Neapolitan Angevin dynasty, but it still needs further scrutiny. There were altogether four coats of arms on the vase, all carefully documented in the Gaignières drawing. There were two coats of arms on the neck of the

vase, and two more on the lid of the mount (these with crests). One of the coats of arms resembles that of King Louis the Great of Hungary (1342–1382): it was this element which led early researchers astray. In truth, the use of Hungarian heraldic elements was common in the Neapolitan Angevin dynasty, as it expressed their claim to the throne of Hungary after the death of Louis the Great in 1382. Analysing the heraldic ensemble, both Krisztinkovich and Horváth concluded that the vase was put into its elaborate silver-gilt mount by Queen Johanna II, ruler of Naples from 1414 to 1435.[20] This is indicated by the heraldic evidence, and by the inscription on the handle, referring to the Queen ('Jehane'). Mounting was probably done in memory of her brother, King Ladislaus. The inscriptions on the mount: 'Le temps est venu Dieu en soit loé' (Times have been fulfilled may the name of God be blessed); and on the foot: 'Se est (il) j'en cay' (I know that well) are regarded as devices (mottos) associated with the Queen. More recently, Christian de Mérindol has also examined the heraldry of the mounts and pointed out that the identification of one of the coats of arms was incorrect in the Hungarian articles: the first device is not that of James Bourbon, the second husband of Johanna II.[21] Instead, it is simply the coat of arms of the Principality of Durazzo, in the same way as it was used for example by Margaret of Durazzo, mother of Johanna II (this form was also used on her tomb in the Cathedral of Salerno). Margaret of Durazzo was the cousin and wife of Charles III (II), king of Naples and of Hungary. After the brutal murder of Charles II in Hungary, Margaret ruled as regent in Naples until 1390. The other coats of arms on the mount of the Fonthill Vase all refer to this branch of the Angevin dynasty. The coat of arms with Anjou lilies and the arms of Jerusalem are the traditional insignia of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, ever since Charles I acquired the title of King of Jerusalem in 1277. The silver-red band around the shield was an element used by the Durazzo branch (as seen on the first coat of arms as well). The red-silver stripes referring to Hungary have been used by them since the time of Charles II of Durazzo. On the mount, the Neapolitan–Hungarian arms are different from the version used by King Louis the Great: the Anjou lilies are on the more important, right side of the shield (the reverse was true in Hungary). Charles of Durazzo as well his son, Ladislaus of Durazzo both used the crest decoration of the ostrich (this was borrowed from King Louis the Great) as well as the elephant, which can also be seen on the ewer. Queen Johanna II, who became Queen of Naples after the death of her brother Ladislaus in 1414, also used the same elements.[22] Based on a careful analysis of the heraldry, Christian de Mérindol identifies Margaret of Durazzo as the commissioner of the mount, dating it to the period just after the murder of Charles of Durazzo, when Margaret became regent on the side of his young son Ladislaus (1386–1387). Her personal insignia are used alongside those elements which refer to his children, Ladislaus and Johanna. While I personally do not agree that the dating of the mount can be limited to such a specific time, I agree that the commissioner was most likely Margaret of Durazzo. The Chinese porcelain vase likely entered Naples on the Mediterranean trade routes, entered the treasury of the Princes of Durazzo, and was mounted for Margaret of Durazzo sometime after 1386.

The later medieval history of the vase is not documented – Horváth supposes that

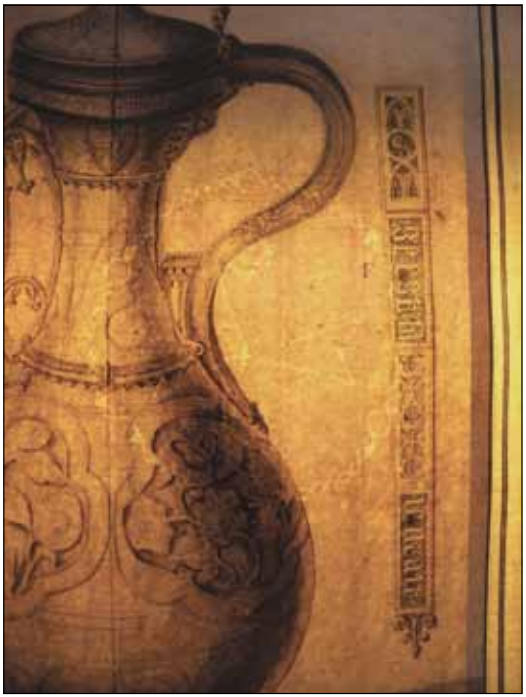
maybe King René of Anjou took it with him when he left Naples for France in 1442.[23] It has to be pointed out that the vase is certainly not identical with another Chinese porcelain vase, which was mentioned in the 1416 inventory of Jean, duke of Berry (1406–1416) – despite the attempt of Suchomel to identify the two.[24] In France, the vase first surfaces in a French royal inventory in 1560: it was mentioned at the royal household of Fointanebleu.[25] In 1689, it was inventoried among the possessions of the Dauphin, son of Louis XIV. (Louis, the Grande Dauphin, who died in 1711).[26] The vase with its mounting was copied in a drawing for the Gaignières Collection in 1713, along with other objects from the Dauphin's possession. At that point it belonged to the collection of Louis Urban Lefèvre de Caumartin. The object itself was subsequently sold, and luckily survived the Revolution – we find it next time at an auction in Paris in 1809 (auction of the de Hoorn Collection).[27] Either then or in one of the following years, it was purchased by William Beckford, who gave it a central position at his Fonthill Abbey collection. (*Fig. 5*) It was recorded several times there. In 1822 Beckford was forced to sell his collection, but in 1823 he bought the ewer back.[28] It is after this time that the ewer somehow lost its precious mounting, becoming a vase again – in 1844, it was listed as a curious Chinese see green bottle. In 1845, the vase was sent to Beckford's heir, the 10th Duke of Hamilton, whose collection was sold at auction by Christie's in 1882. The vase was bought by the National Museum of Ireland – all traces of its illustrious origin having been forgotten by then.[29]

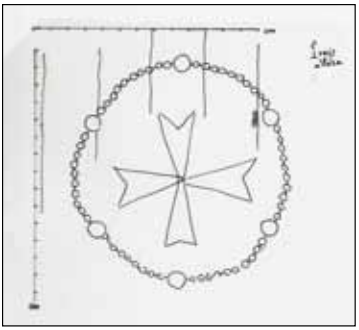


5. The vase among other treasures of Fonthill Abbey (from Rutter *1823)*



6. Drawing of the Fonthill Vase, *paper, pencil, watercolour, Museum of Applied Arts Budapest, KRTF 261*





7. a–b Watermark of the Budapest drawing, photo and drawing by Edit Darabos

There is something else in connection with this prized object which is generally overlooked: another copy of the coloured drawing documenting it. The drawing usually reproduced is from the Gaignières Collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which is attributed to Barthélemy Remy. In the Paris manuscript, one can find a description of the object along with the drawing, with an attempt by Gaignières to identify the coat of arms on the mount. However, the drawing is not the original – it is just a simplified copy, which was probably also made in 1713. The more carefully executed original drawing has been at the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest since 1897.[30] (*Fig. 6*) We can establish that it is the original partly because of its better quality and more detail, but also because it has the letters and numbers which serve as keys to the written description. It is not known why it was replaced with a copy in the Gaignières Collection, but the Budapest drawing has also been known since the late 19th century. At that time, it was in the collection of Baron Jérome Pichon, who had acquired it from the private collection of Comte de Rohan Chabot. He was fully aware of its significance – as was Mazerolle, who first published the Paris drawing in 1897.[31] Pichon did not want to sell the drawing, although the director of the Museum of Applied Arts, Jenő Radisics tried to buy it from him.[32] The drawing was described in the auction catalogue of the Pichon-sale in the year following his death in 1896 and was purchased by

the Museum.[33] In Budapest, the drawing remained a little bit forgotten, although it was published by Jenő Horváth in 1986 (interestingly, Dezső Dercsényi already published a photo of it in 1941 – but identified it as the Paris copy in the caption).[34] With help of chief restorer Edit Darabos, we have recently examined the watercolour more closely, and we have no doubt of its 18th-century origin because of the paper and its watermark, as well as other characteristics.

The paper holding the watercolour itself is 44 by 30 centimetres – about the same as the size of the Paris copy. This paper is glued to a paper frame, and these are mounted together on cardboard – the total size with the mount is 63.5 by 48 centimetres. The paper itself is handmade, with a watermark showing a Maltese cross inside a circle. (*Fig. 7*) It is significant that details of the enamel decoration of the ewer are more faithfully reproduced on the Budapest drawing, which helps with a more historically accurate estimation of this highly significant object. For example, the figures around the coat of arms on the lid are not indicated on the Budapest copy – raising the question of whether these were there on the original. Hopefully, future analysis of the Fonthill Vase will rely on this important document while also placing the original object in its proper historical context.

NOTES

1 This paper was originally presented at the annual meeting of ICOM-ICDAD in Kyoto, September 2–3, 2019. The conference was titled *The Future of Traditions in the Arts, East and West*. Previously, I have published a summary of the history of the vase on my blog: Jékely, Zsombor: *Medieval Hungary: A Note on the Fonthill Vase* (blog), 17 December 2010, https://jekely.blogspot.com/2010/12/note-on-fonthillvase.html [accessed 15 September 2020].

2 National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, inv. no. DC: 1882.3941.

3 Gray, Basil: 'Chinese Porcelain of the Fourteenth Century III: C'hing-Pai'. *The British Museum Quarterly* 25, 1962, pp. 29–32.

4 Meicun, Lin – Zhang, Ran: 'Chinese Porcelain Jar Associated with Marco Polo. A Discussion from an Archaeological Perspective'. *European Journal of Archaeology* 21(1), 2017, pp. 1–18. DOI: 10.1017/eaa.2017.21

5 For a new overview of porcelain in 15th-century Italy, see: Clark, Leah R.: 'The peregrinations of porcelain: The collections of Duchess Eleonora d'Aragona of Ferrara'. *Journal of the History of Collections* 32, 2020, pp. 275–288 (with an incorrect summary of the history of the Fonthill Vase on p. 277); for Naples, see also: Clark, Leah R.: 'Objects of Exchange: Diplomatic Entaglements in Fifteenth-century Naples'. *Predella journal of visual arts* 43–44, 2018, pp. 129–154.

6 Spallanzani, Marco: *Ceramiche orientali a Firenze nel Rinascimento*. Firenze, 1978, pp. 85–86.

7 Whitehouse, David: 'Chinese Porcelain in Medieval Europe'. *Medieval Archaeology* 16(1), 1972, pp. 63–78. DOI: 10.1080/00766097.1972.11735347. Circa 1492, 132, cat. 16.

8 Recueil de dessins, gravures et aquarelles. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, FR 20070, fol. 8., with a three page description on fols. 9–10.

9 Mazerolle, Fernand: 'Un vase oriental en porcelaine orné d'une monture d'orfèvrerie du XIVe siècle'. *Gazette de Beaux-Arts* XVII, 1897, pp. 53–58 (hereinafter Mazerolle 1897).

10 Lane, Arthur: 'The Gaignères-Fonthill Vase: A Chinese Porcelain of about 1300'. *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 103, No. 697, 1961, pp. 124–132 (hereinafter Lane 1961).

11 A few examples of this narrative: Lunsingh Scheurleer, D.F.: *Chinesisches und japanisches Porzellanin europäisch Fassungen*. Braunschweig, 1980, pp. 2–5; Watson, F.J.B.– Wilson, Gillian: *Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. P. Getty Museum*. Malibu, 1982, pp. 3–4; Levenson, Jay A. (ed.).: *Circa 1492. Art in the Age of Exploration.* Washington, 1991, p. 131, cat. 15; Arnold, Lauren: *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures. The Franciscan Mission to China and its Influence on the Art of the West, 1250–1350*. San Francisco, 1999 (hereinafter Arnold 1999), pp. 119–133; Kerr, Rose: 'Chinese Porcelain in Early European Collections'. In: Jackson, Anna – Jaffer, Amin (eds.): *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800*. London, 2004, pp. 44–51. So far, the only important study where this traditional narrative has been rejected is: Suebsman, Daniel: *Chinesisches Porzellan in Deutschland. Seine Rezeptionsgeschichte vom 15. bis ins 18. Jahrhundert.* [Dissertation] Bonn, 2019, p. 24 (referencing my blog entry cited above in note 1).

12 Suchomel, Filip: Cat. nos. 4.7–4.8. In: Fajt, Jiři – Hörsch, Markus (eds.): *Kaiser Karl IV. 1316–2016.* Prag–Nürnberg, 2016, pp. 334–337 (hereinafter Suchomel 2016).

13 Suchomel's theory was largely influenced by Arnold 1999.

14 Krisztinkovich, Béla: 'Hozzászólás Arthur Lane a *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 1967/I. számában megjelent posztumusz cikkéhez a Gaignières-Fonthill vázáról'. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 18, 1969, pp. 187–192 (hereinafter Krisztinkovich 1969).

15 Lane, Arthur: A Gaigniéres-Fonthill váza – egy kínai porcelán az 1300 körüli évekből. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 16, 1967, pp. 35–43.

16 Dercsényi, Dezső: *Nagy Lajos kora*. Budapest, 1941, pp. 162–163 (hereinafter Dercsényi 1941). Dercsényi published the Gaignières drawing and followed the arguments put forward by Mazerolle 1897.

17 Horváth, Jenő: 'The pedigree of Louis the Great's ewer'. In: Vardy, Steven B. – Grosschmid, Géza – Domonkos, Leslie S. (eds.): *Louis the Great, king of Hungary and Poland*. New York, 1986, pp. 325–345 (hereinafter Horváth 1986).

18 Krisztinkovics, Béla– Korach, Maurizio: 'Un antico documento sulla porcellana cinese in Europa'. *Faenza* 53, 1967, pp. 27–30.

19 Whitehouse, D. B.: 'Chinese porcelain from Lucera Castle'. *Faenza* 52, 1966, pp. 90–93.

20 Krisztinkovich 1969, p. 189; Horváth 1986, p. 334.

21 Mérindol, Christian de: 'La provenance et la datation du vase Gaignières-Fonthill et de la tenture des Preux de New York. L'emblématique et la thématique peuvent fixer sur une oeuvre d'art un moment d'histoire'. *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France 1990*, 1992, pp. 112–118, https://doi.org/10.3406/bsnaf.1992.9552.

22 Further details about Neapolitan heraldry: Gyulay, Éva: 'A Magyar Királyság címere Anjou Renée heraldikai reprezentációjában'. In: Bárány, Attila – Pósán, László (eds.): *Causa unionis, causa fidei, causa reformationis in capite et membris. Tanulmányok a konstanzi zsinat 600.évfordulója alkalmából.* Debrecen, 2014, pp. 341–354.

23 Horváth 1986, p. 335.

24 Suchomel 2016, 336.

25 Horváth 1986, p. 330.

26 Watson, Sir Francis – Whitehead, John: 'An Inventory Dated 1689 of the Chinese Porcelain in the Collection of the Grand Dauphin, Son of Louis XIV, at Versailles. In memoriam Pierre Verlet, le maître suprème'. *Journal of the History of Collections* 3, 1991, pp. 13–52. The vase was entered as number 111 in the inventory. Castelluccio, Stéphane 'La collection de vases en pierres dures du Grand Dauphin'. *Versalia. Revue de la Société des Amis de Versailles* 4, 2001, pp. 38–59. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/versa.2001.1039

27 Reitlinger, Gerard: 'Further Adventures of the Gaignières-Fonthill Vase'. *The Burlington*

Magazine, Vol. 104, No. 706, 1962, p. 34; cf.: *Vente du Cabinet de Monseiur le Baron de Hoorn, le 22 Novembre 1809*. Paris, 1809, no. 538 – describing the object as a Japanese vase, mounted with heraldic devices of the Neapolitan Angevins.

28 Rutter, John: *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*. London, 1823, XXIV ('an oriental china bottle, superbly mounted, said to be the earliest specimen of porcelain introduced into Europe') (hereinafter Rutter 1823).

29 These later stages of the history have already been written by Lane 1961.

30 Museum of Applied Arts Budapest, Archives, Collection of Designs and Drawings, KRTF 261. Paper, pencil, watercolour, total size 63.5×48 cm. See also in the collection database of the museum: https://collections.imm.hu/gyujtemeny/rajz-az-un-gaignieres-fonthill-vaza-akvarellmasolata/38724?npn=1

31 Mazerolle 1897, p. 53. He mentions the other drawing in the footnote.

32 This information, based on correspondence, was given by Horváth 1986, p. 330.

33 *Catalogue de la collection de dessins et estampes de l'école française du XVIIe et du XVIIIe siècle de feu M. Le Baron Jerome Pichon*. Paris, 1897, pp. 11–12, no. 74: École française XVIIIe siècle. «Aiguière en porcelaine blanche avec des fleurs en relief, garni et monté d'argent doré artistiquement et délicatement ouvragé et émaillé de différentes couleurs, aux armes pleines de France et de Hongrie.» Très beau dessin, lavé d'encre de Chine et d'aquarelle provenant de la collection Gaignières; il est accompagné de notice descriptive manuscrite.

34 Horváth 1986, fig. 6; Dercsényi 1941, p. 163.

A FONTHILL-VÁZA BUDAPESTI AKVARELLMÁSOLATA

ÖSSZEGZÉS

Az úgynevezett Fonthill- (vagy Gaignières-Fonthill) váza néven ismert kínai porcelánváza a legkorábbi, biztosan dokumentált, Európába került kínai porcelántárgy. A vázát 1882 óta az Ír Nemzeti Múzeum őrzi Dublinban, ahol fontos állandó kiállítási darab. Történetét a szakirodalomban számos félreértés övezi a mai napig. Egy palackformájú, fehér porcelánvázáról van szó, amelynek felületét plasztikusan kialakított növényi díszek és fehéres-világoszöld máz (úgynevezett Qingbai-máz) borítja. A Jingdezhenben készített tárgy készítési ideje a Jüan-dinasztia korszaka (1271–1368), azon belül pedig a 14. század első fele. A váza nyakán látható fúrt lyuk jelzi, hogy a tárgyat egykor foglalatba helyezték, kancsóvá alakították. Egykori gótikus foglalatát egy 18. század eleji akvarell ábrázolja. Az aranyozott ezüstfoglalatot zománcos dekoráció, köztük címerábrázolások egészítik ki. A párizsi Bibliothèque Nationale gyűjteményében lévő akvarellt F. Mazerolle publikálta 1897-ben a *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* hasábjain. Bár az ábrázolás ettől kezdve bekerült a szakirodalomba, csak 1961-ben ismerte fel Arthur Lane, hogy a Mazerolle által publikált ábrázolás a Dublinban őrzött, azóta ötvösművű foglalatát elvesztett porcelánvázát örökíti meg. Tanulmánya meghatározó jelentőségűnek bizonyult a kínai porcelánok európai importjának feldolgozása során.

Mazerolle és Lane megállapításai nagy hatást gyakoroltak a kutatásra. Hatásukra terjedt el az a félreértés, hogy a kínai váza a Magyar Királyságon át került Európába, és eredetileg Anjou-házi uralkodónk, Nagy Lajos király birtokában volt. Állításuk szerint a vázát feltehetően nesztoriánus keresztények csoportja hozta Európába, amikor 1338-ban Kínából Avignonba utaztak követségbe XII. Benedek pápához. A váza 1381-ig lehetett Magyarországon, amikor Nagy Lajos király az egyébként utódjának is kiszemelt Anjou (Kis) Károlynak ajándékozta abból az alkalomból, hogy ő III. Károly néven megszerezte a nápolyi trónt, és bevonult Nápolyba. A porcelánváza aranyozott foglalata ebből az alkalommal készült Közép-Európában – a váza további története pedig Nápolyon át a francia udvar felé vezet. Ennek a történetnek sajnos egyetlen eleme sem igazolható, több részlete pedig bizonyosan téves.

A szakirodalom bizonytalanságai, a fentebb ismertetett megalapozatlan feltevések meglepők, mert a Fonthill-váza igaz történetét már korábban publikálta két magyar kutató, Krisztinkovich Béla és Horváth Jenő. Legfontosabb észrevételük, hogy a váza történetében nem a magyar, hanem a nápolyi Anjou-dinasztia szerepét kell kutatni. Tanulmányaik azonban nehezen hozzáférhetőek maradtak, legalábbis a keleti kerámiatörténet kutatói számára.

Megállapításaik lényege, hogy a kínai porcelánváza a Mediterráneumba vezető kereskedelmi útvonalakon keresztül érkezhetett, tengeren vagy szárazföldi úton, és

első dokumentálható állomása a Nápolyi Királyságban volt. Nápolyhoz a foglalat heraldikai dísze köti a Fonthill-vázát. A Gaignières-gyűjteményben őrzött akvarell címerei jelentették a kiindulópontot minden eddigi vizsgálat számára. A vázán összesen négy címer található: kettő a nyakrészen (egy-egy oldalon), két, sisakdísszel kombinált címerpajzs pedig a zománcdíszes fedélen. Mazerolle vagy Lane számára a Magyar Királyságra utaló elemek bizonyultak félrevezetőnek – Krisztinkovich és Horváth helyesen hívják fel a figyelmet arra, hogy a magyar címer elemeit a nápolyi Anjouk is folyamatosan használták. Analízisük azzal a következtetéssel zárul, hogy a foglalatot II. Johanna nápolyi királynő készíttette, akire egyébként a kancsó fülén futó felirat – *Jehana* – is utal. II. Johanna Durazzói (Kis) Károly lánya volt, és 1414-től 1435-ig uralkodott Nápolyban. A vázát feltehetően 1414-ben elhunyt fivére, Nápolyi László emlékére készíttette. Pontosításra szorul, hogy a sorban a legelső címer valójában a durazzói hercegség címere, ahogy Durazzói Margit is használta (és nem II. Johanna második férjének, Bourbon Jakab hercegnek a címere). Egészen biztosan a Nápolyt megszakításokkal 1383 és 1434 között birtokló, magyar trónigényüket soha fel nem adó Durazzói Anjouágra utal a címeregyüttes, a megrendelő pedig leginkább Durazzói Margit lehetett.

A váza Nápolyból valamikor Franciaországba került, talán Anjou René nápolyi király vihette magával, amikor 1442-ben Nápolyt elhagyni kényszerült, és Provance-ba menekült. Franciaországban a Fonthill-váza 1560-ban bukkan fel először biztosan: ekkor a Fointainebleu-i kastély királyi háztartásának összeírásában azonosítható. 1689-ben a Grand Dauphin tulajdonában írták össze; ő 1711-ben halt meg. A Dauphin halála után, tulajdonának felmérése során került sor a váza dokumentálására is – 1713-ban készült Francois-Roger de Gaignières leírása és az akvarellmásolat is a vázáról és címeres foglalatáról. Valamikor ezt követően a vázát eladták, vagy más módon kikerült a királyi gyűjteményekből – 1809-ben bukkan fel ismét, a de Hoorn-gyűjtemény párizsi aukcióján. Ekkor vagy valamivel később szerzi meg az angol gyűjtő, William Beckford, akinek Fonthill Abbey-ben kialakított kollekciója egyik csúcsdarabja lesz; többször publikálták is. Beckford 1822-ben kénytelen volt gyűjteményét elárverezni, de a kancsót végül 1823-ban visszaszerezte. Valamikor ezt követően veszthette el a kancsó az ötvösművű foglalatot, egyelőre érthetetlen módon. 1844-ben feltehetően már a foglalat nélküli vázát írják le Beckford hagyatékában – egy különös és sérült, tengerzöld kínai vázaként. A váza 1845-ben Londonba, Hamilton 10. hercegéhez, Beckford örököséhez került. Az ő hagyatékából bocsátották árverésre 1882-ben, amikor is a dublini Nemzeti Múzeum megvásárolta. A tárgy egykori története addigra már feledésbe merült.

A Fonthill-váza kérdéskörének van még egy aspektusa, amely a nemzetközi tudományos közvélemény figyelmére méltó, ez pedig az akvarellmásolattal kapcsolatos. A párizsi Gaignières-rajzgyűjteményben rövid szöveggel kísért színezett rajz nem az őspéldány, csupán annak egy egyszerűsített másodpéldánya. Az akvarellnek van egy szebben kivitelezett változata is, amelyet 1897 óta a budapesti Iparművészeti Múzeum őriz. Nemcsak nagyobb pontossága miatt tarthatjuk ezt a példányt az eredetinek, de azért is, mert ezen láthatóak azok a betűjelzések, amelyek feloldása a Gaignières-féle leírásban található meg. Maga az akvarellt hordozó papírlap mérete 44 × 30 cm – ez

kb. egyezik a párizsi lap méretével. Az akvarell egy belső papírkeretre van ragasztva, és ez az együttes van paszpartuba foglalva (a teljes méret így 63,5×48 cm). A merített papír tulajdonságai és egyelőre még meghatározatlan vízjele egyaránt arra utalnak, hogy valóban a 18. század elején készült alkotásról van szó, amely kulcsfontosságú a Fonthill-váza történetének rekonstruálása kapcsán. A budapesti rajz ugyanis pontosabban adja vissza az eredeti tárgy jellegzetességeit, a hiányokat is beleértve. A porcelántárgy díszítéseit sokkal plasztikusabban adja vissza a budapesti példány, és egészen eltérő pl. a fedél zománcozott díszének motívumkincse. Mindenesetre a budapesti rajz részletes vizsgálata közelebb vihet minket a Fonthill-váza igazi történetének felderítéséhez, megerősíti a nápolyi udvarral kimutatott kapcsolatot, és hozzásegítheti tudományterületünket néhány makacsul továbbélő tévhit eloszlatásához.