

1. Introduction

Ever since the discovery of the maritime routes to America by Christopher Columbus in 1492, and to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498, the global expansion of trade and trade routes influenced European culture in an unprecedented manner. Knowledge about geography and foreign nations expanded, and the introduction of new consumables such as tea and chocolate transformed European table culture. Silk and fine cottons from China and India, once brought to the West via the Silk Roads, now arrived in large quantities at the European courts. The European global expansion had its downsides, of course. The conquest of the Americas led to the expulsion, exploitation and eradication of its indigenous peoples. The trade in sugar cane products became the linchpin of colonial rule on the Caribbean islands. After the extinction of almost the entire native population, large areas became available for cultivation. Millions of Africans were deported and enslaved over the course of 400 years to work on the plantations under inhuman conditions.

One trade item, which also found its way to Europe with the growing maritime traffic, was Chinese porcelain. Still a mysterious substance in the 16th century, vessels made from the luxurious-looking material quickly gained wide popularity with the intensification of the export trade by the Dutch. Millions of East Asian porcelains reached Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, partly through the professional East Asia trading companies and partly through private enterprise. Chinese and – later – Japanese porcelain soon became deeply anchored in European culture, where it was used for its intended purpose as tableware, as gifts exchanged between royal courts, or as decorative and useful items in the households of even the general public. In the early 18th century, porcelain could already be considered as a global commodity due to its worldwide distribution.

Augustus the Strong (1670–1733) (fig. 1), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, had a particularly passionate relationship with porcelain. Not only was



Fig. 1. *Augustus II the Strong*, by Louis de Silvestre, 1718.

hard-paste porcelain re-invented in Europe for the first time during Augustus' reign by what would become famous as the Meissen manufactory, but even in Asia there was no larger collection of East Asian porcelain dating from the late 17th and early 18th centuries that offered such deep insights into the structures of global trade at this time.

The Elector-King had purchased porcelain from varying sources since around 1700, but a systematic approach to building an East Asian porcelain collection is only apparent from 1714/15. In 1717, Augustus acquired the Dutch Palace (fig. 2), a pleasure palace in Dresden's New Town on the northern bank of the Elbe, from General Field Marshal Heinrich Jacob von Flemming (1667–1728).² It became the place where the majority of both the collections of East Asian and Meissen porcelain were kept. The Palace Inventory (SKD Inventare, Nr. 324), compiled between 1721 and 1727, itemised all the interior furnishings of the Dutch Palace, which included almost 25,000 pieces of East Asian porcelain by 1727. About 8000 of these objects have survived and are still kept in the Dresden Zwinger. Identifying the remaining objects in the Palace Inventory is facilitated by the historical inventory number (referred to as the Palace Number) that is incised into or painted on the porcelain body, usually on the base of an object. Acquisition lists kept in the archives of the Porzellansammlung (SKD, Archiv Porzellansammlung, I K 2.1–II.K 1.1, 1700–1718) and the Saxon State Archives



Fig. 2. *The Japanese Palace in Dresden, south front facing the Elbe River.*

(13472 Schatullenkasse, vols. 1–35, 1705–1718) complement the Inventory, and provide insights into Augustus the Strong's elaborate – and costly – plans to assemble an exquisite porcelain collection. Furthermore, they offer insights into the acquisition process before the Palace Inventory was drawn up.

Augustus the Strong's porcelain collection was compiled at a time when porcelain imports lay solely in the hands of private dealers. Previously, the major trading companies such as the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or *Vereenigde Geoctroyeerde Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company, VOC) were active in the porcelain trade, and imported the coveted objects to Europe from around 1634. Jingdezhen, the centre of Chinese porcelain production, faced severe problems in the distribution of its porcelain after the fall of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The kilns had been destroyed in 1680 but were rebuilt after Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722) established his rule in South China as well. Although porcelain was still produced after 1644, its scarcity, high prices and sometimes poor quality made it less valuable to the VOC as an export product. Exports of Japanese porcelain from Arita could not replace the quantities of porcelain formerly shipped from China. Thus, between 1694 and 1729, the VOC did not officially trade in porcelain at all, but left it to private merchants, who had objects bought and shipped by the Company on their behalf.³ In contrast to the VOC's well-documented trade, however, the lack of source material has made it hitherto impossible to draw any hard-and-fast conclusions about the extent of or the types of porcelain traded at the beginning of the 18th century.

Shortly before the acquisition of the Dutch Palace in 1716, Augustus the Strong sent the Italian officer Peter Robert Taparelli, Count of Lagnasco (1659–1735) (fig. 3), to the Netherlands to find and buy porcelain from private dealers. Over the next two years, almost 2000 porcelain objects were purchased with the help of local dealers and shipped to Dresden, precisely in the period that the porcelain trade was in private hands.

An extensive body of documents surrounding these acquisitions still exists today, and forms the basis of this publication. The documents date from the period 1716 to 1718 and consist of letters, specifications, invoices and transport documents connected to two lots of porcelain acquired for Augustus the Strong. They include Augustus the Strong's letters to Lagnasco, the latter's replies, and the missives of the Dutch contacts who assisted the Count in his quest for porcelain (SächsStA-D, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, Loc. 00380/03 and Loc. 00662/07). To a lesser extent, these sources include information on the acquisition of other artworks besides porcelain.

This the first time that the exchange of letters between Augustus the Strong, Count Lagnasco, and the porcelain dealers in Amsterdam and The Hague has been published and analysed in the context of the compilation of the royal



Fig. 3. Peter Robert Taparelli, Count of Lagnasco, by Louis de Silvestre, 1724.

porcelain collection. Buying works of art was not the main purpose of Lagnasco's stay in the Netherlands, and Augustus' collecting activity was embedded in a wider political framework. The correspondence between the Elector-King and the Count also includes numerous observations that specifically refer to political issues.

They have been transcribed in full and made searchable online for the first time, making this a valuable research source for art historians and others. In order to place Lagnasco's undertakings in the Netherlands in a broader historical perspective, this publication also includes a short overview of the political situation around 1716 (see chapter 5.1).

For the research into Augustus' porcelain collection, the letters written by the merchants in the Netherlands, namely the wholesaler Egidius van den Bempden (1667–1737) and the asiatica dealer couple Madame and Monsieur St. Martin (n.d.) are of particular interest. They provide information on the availability of objects, how buyers competed with each other, what prices were paid, how many objects were bought, and the conditions under which the merchants operated. The networks that had to be established to find porcelain fit for a king, and the efforts these networks had to make to purchase the pieces and transport them back to Dresden, will be discussed here, as will their fate after they arrived in Dresden.

Augustus the Strong's instructions in his letters to Lagnasco offer insights into the objects the king wanted, and the plans he was making to acquire the rarest and most valuable pieces. When he bought the Dutch Palace, Augustus created an enclosed space solely for the display of both foreign and domestic porcelain. While the project of furnishing a palace entirely with porcelain was probably the motivation behind the sudden increase in acquisitions, the question must be asked whether this was the only reason for Augustus' lavish outlay. The progress of the Meissen manufactory in producing superlative porcelain and the incentive of surpassing the quality of East Asian wares by emulating them, can be seen as another factor that fired Augustus' demand for East Asian wares. How were they presented in the royal space? What function did they serve, other than testifying to the wealth of a Baroque ruler? What input and influence did Augustus the Strong have regarding the purchase of pieces, and can acquisition patterns be detected?

The aim of this publication is to examine Augustus the Strong's East Asian porcelain collection as part of an intertwined mercantile history, by employing the unique mixture of contemporary written documentation and historical objects. The combination of the identified object, its corresponding entry in the Palace Inventory and in the acquisition lists mentioned above, enables a reconstruction of the provenance history as far back as 1715. Thus, this publication sheds light on an aspect of porcelain trade at the beginning of the 18th century that was previously neglected due to the lack of material and the concentration of research on the macrostructures of trade, for example, as conducted by the major trading companies. The significance and scope of the private networks and its agents are appraised here for the first time, offering a deep insight into the microstructures of the global trade in porcelain.

Others have approached researching the collection from multiple viewpoints, including from an overall perspective that recounts the history of the collection in Dresden (Fichtner 1939). Friedrich Reichel provided an overview of the collection's character and briefly discusses Lagnasco's undertakings in the Netherlands (1973). In other publications, he examines the Japanese (1980) and Chinese (1993) styles and groups. Additional studies focus on the importance of East Asian porcelain as an inspiration for Meissen porcelain (Pietsch 1996, Weber 2013), and clarify the significance of the collection for the cultural exchanges between East Asia and Europe. The catalogue by Ulrich Pietsch and Cordula Bischoff (2014) analyses the Dutch Palace and the history of its furnishing and the collection in great detail. What these publications have in common is that they mainly focus on the years after 1721, when the collection had already been moved into the Dutch Palace and was recorded in the Palace Inventory. While they do touch upon the creation and growth of the royal collection prior to 1721 (Reichel 1987, Schwarm 2014b-d), an extensive analysis of the objects that were added in the second decade of the 18th century has so far not been conducted.

Regarding the routes and networks associated with the porcelain trade, previous publications mainly focused on the works of the professional East Asia companies. Tijs Volker (1954, 1959) laid the foundations with his evaluation of the Chinese porcelain shipments noted in the *dagh-registers* (daily journals) of the Dutch settlements in Batavia, Hirado and Deshima from 1602 to 1757. Christiaan Jörg's publication *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* is another important analysis of the VOC's trading systems and profits from 1728 to 1795. Regarding the VOC trade in Japanese porcelain, the publications of Cynthia Viallé (2000) and Miki Sakuraba (2009) are both significant additions to the study of the chronology of Japanese shipments to the Netherlands, as well as the Dutch reception of Japanese porcelain objects. Private dealers in East Asian porcelain who operated independently of the major trading companies have rarely been a topic of investigation, although they were discussed in the catalogue *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age*, which accompanied the eponymous exhibition at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in 2015/2016 (Ven 2015). This publication aims to – at least partially – fill this gap in the research, and offer insights into a single private trading network associated with porcelain acquisitions in the early 18th century.

This publication is divided into two parts: The first part explains the historical and political circumstances of Lagnasco's purchase, and tries to reconstruct the events surrounding it. While the main focus lies on examining and evaluating Lagnasco's acquisitions in the Netherlands (chapters 7–9) and their addition to the royal collection (chapters 10–11.1), explanatory background information is provided

on the contemporary political settings (chapter 5) and the financial complexities of international trade in the early 18th century (chapter 6). Chapter 4 provides an overview of the role that the VOC played in the trade in East Asian porcelain. An attempt to ascertain Augustus the Strong's personal motives and plans for the creation of a porcelain collection is made in chapters 2, 3 and 12.

The second part consists of the annotated transcriptions of letters, documents and specifications connected to the purchase plans. Transcriptions that were newly created for this publication follow the recommendations of the *Edition frühneuzeitlicher Texte* of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft historischer Forschungseinrichtungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e. V.*⁴ All other previously available transcriptions – such as those of the Palace Inventory – were left in their original form and were not adapted to *Edition* recommendations.

Unless an English equivalent exists, names and royal titles are in their original language. Quotes from historical documents are translated into English in the running text, but are left in their original language and as full quotes in the footnotes and endnotes. With exception of the Palace Inventory, all translations from German, French and Dutch into English are by the author.⁵