

3. From the *Kunstkammer* to the Dutch Palace¹⁰

When Augustus the Strong became Elector of Saxony in 1694, East Asian porcelain had already been present at the Saxon court for more than a century. The earliest pieces in the Dresden collection arrived in 1590 as gifts from the Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando I de' Medici (1549–1609), who sent at least 14 porcelains to Christian I of Saxony (1560–1591), of which eight still exist in the collection. They are small objects – bowls and vessels of Chinese origin, of various shapes and decorative techniques. It is unlikely, however, that these objects were anything more than curiosities in the 16th century, and they certainly did not rouse any further interest in collecting ceramic wares. At this time, porcelain was still exceptionally rare and difficult to obtain, as the sea route to Asia had only been discovered in 1498. Mass imports did not happen until the VOC began trading in porcelain around 1602.¹¹

It can be assumed that other discrete pieces of porcelain found their way to the *Kunstkammer* (literally “art chamber”) in Dresden in the 17th century. Curiosity cabinets emerged in the 16th century among the nobility, wealthy scholars and the merchant class. Objects from all disciplines – for example, natural history, geography, religion and art – were kept and displayed in these cabinets, making them “universal collections of encyclopaedic character”.¹² Curiosity cabinets can be considered as precursors to today’s museums, although their contents were not accumulated by means of a “mandatory norm of collecting”,¹³ but rather for their inherent exoticism and foreignness. A tendency to encyclopaedic collecting often can be noted, indicating an urge to unravel and reveal the design of God's universe.

The *Kunstkammer* gradually took shape in Dresden from the middle of the 15th century. By 1560, during the reign of Elector August (1526–1586), it was located on the top floor of the west wing of the Royal Castle and housed foreign

objects that had entered the Saxon court either as acquisitions or as gifts.¹⁴ The first inventory was created in 1584. When August died in 1586, the *Kunstammer* housed a total of 9586 objects of all sorts, ranging from artworks and religious objects to mechanical tools.¹⁵ The collection's character changed during the reign of Elector Christian I (1560–1591), when there was an emphasis on enlarging the collection.

That porcelain was kept in the *Kunstammer* can be inferred from the inventory of 1640. At that time, the collection had expanded to ten rooms on the Royal Castle's upper floor. There, porcelain was kept in a cabinet, described as an "Indian *tresur*"¹⁶ made of wood with lacquer works and decorated with gold", which had been presented to Elector Johann Georg I (1585–1656) by the Duke of Weimar in 1616.¹⁷ The inventory reports that 16 porcelain objects – probably identical to those in the Medici gift of 1590 – were kept in the cabinet, all of them small objects such as beakers, cups, bowls or "drinking vessels".

Porcelain was not considered as the main attraction in the *Kunstammer* in the 17th century. This can be concluded from what was written about the collection. In 1683, Chamberlain Tobias Beutel the Elder created a guidebook for the curiosity cabinet, in which he provided relatively detailed descriptions of each of the ten rooms and their interiors. Despite its elaborate character, the book hardly describes any of the porcelain. Beutel only mentions the "Indian vault with porcelain dishes",¹⁸ without even stating the types of porcelain or any quantities. Beutel's reference to the "Indian vault" in a chapter of the guidebook dealing with drinking vessels leads to the assumption that no exceptional objects had been added to the royal porcelain collection since the inventory of 1640.

Considering the long history of the presence of porcelain at the Saxon court, the question remains as to when Augustus the Strong began to systematically acquire porcelain with a view to amassing a collection.

The records of the *Schatullenkasse* ("casket purse") or *Schatullenrechnungen* ("casket invoices") are an important resource for investigating Augustus the Strong's private expenses. These invoices document the financing of art acquisitions and were administered primarily by Privy Chamberlain Georg Peter Steinhäuser (n.d.). As only the invoices for the years 1705–1718 are still extant today, it is difficult to make a comprehensive assessment of the amounts spent on art before or after this timeframe. Several specifications or delivery lists created separately from the *Schatullenrechnungen* only provide a partial insight into the art acquisitions during the early years of Augustus' reign, such as the delivery to the Saxon court in 1696 of tea and coffee wares from a certain Dietrich von Callenberg (n.d.) for a price of 100 Reichstaler.¹⁹ The first larger acquisition of porcelain reached Dresden in March 1700 from Amsterdam, and was delivered by a certain Charles LeRoy²⁰ (n.d.) for 555 "rixdal d'holland".²¹ It included

44 porcelain and Terra Sigillata objects, mostly teapots, bottles, beakers and plates, and one garniture comprising seven vases. The delivery list describes the objects as being “gilded in solid gold”, and furthermore mentions “six goblets of white porcelain, gilded in solid gold, in the shape of a boat, for Batavia”.²² Unfortunately, no object of this kind can be identified in the Porzellansammlung today. Charles LeRoy delivered more porcelain in the years 1703, 1705, 1707, and 1711, but precisely how many objects were acquired through this dealer remains unclear, since this information is omitted from the *Schatullenrechnungen*. The invoices, however, describe the acquisition of “valuables, fashion accessories and porcelain” worth 3734 Reichstaler in 1705, and porcelain worth 2861 Reichstaler in 1707.²³

A change in the number of *Schatullenrechnungen* pertaining to the acquisition of porcelain can be detected around December 1714. Only a handful of porcelain deliveries were recorded prior to this date.

Porcelain is rarely mentioned as individually purchased goods, but is subsumed under the umbrella term “Indian”, which was used as a general description for objects from India, Japan or China. In 1712, Prince Alexander Danilovich Menshikov (1673–1729) delivered “Indian mats and objects” and “Indian gifts”.²⁴ In the same year, Privy Chamberlain Georg Peter Steinhäuser accepted “18 Indian garnitures and figures” as well as “12 pairs of coffee cups with houcoupen [*sic!*]”.²⁵

One of the earliest examples of an acquisition mainly comprising porcelain and described in greater detail is a tea service consisting of four sets of “extra fine porcelain”, encompassing 74 porcelain items, in addition to two pots made of silver.²⁶ Sigmund Reifenbach (n.d.) supplied the service in November 1713. This acquisition differs from earlier purchases, in that it largely consisted of porcelain, and is documented more thoroughly than before. A sudden increase in new additions to the ceramics collection can be seen in the *Schatullenrechnungen* in the second half of 1714: a total of eight porcelain purchases of 117 objects. A similarly sudden rise in acquisitions is detectable at the beginning of 1715, when the Berlin-based porcelain dealer Madame Anna Elisabeth de Bassetouche (d. 1730) delivered at least 532 porcelain objects – more than four times as much as in all of 1714 – for the sum of 2368.22 Reichstaler on 31 January 1715. This extensive order even predated a contract of 1717, in which Madame Bassetouche guaranteed to supply the Saxon court with East Asian porcelain worth 20,000 Reichstaler.²⁷ In 1715, the *Schatullenrechnungen* records at least 19 purchases of East Asian porcelain along with other asiatica, adding at least 1132 porcelain objects to those already in Dresden. It is particularly striking that the majority of these acquisitions was made under the aegis of Maria Magdalena Bielińska, Countess Dönhoff (1693–after 1737), Augustus the Strong’s mistress from 1713. The Countess had porcelain worth 4948 Reichstaler delivered from

eight different dealers in Poland.²⁸ It is beyond the scope of this essay to further analyse Countess Dönhoff's influence in the formative years of the royal porcelain collection. It is nevertheless indisputable that, like Count Lagnasco in the Netherlands one year later, the Countess could draw upon an extensive network of dealers and connoisseurs in Warsaw to fulfil the king's desire for porcelain.

3.1 Porcelain repositories in Dresden and Poland

In 1715, there was no dedicated porcelain cabinet in the royal residences in Dresden and Warsaw. In Dresden, at least three porcelain repositories are known: The Green Vault, the *Mamornes Gemach* ("Marble Chamber") in the Royal Castle, and the Turkish Palace in the Italian Garden. The Green Vault, Augustus' treasury, housed all sorts of valuables, among them East Asian porcelain. The *Mamornes*



Fig. 4. Pot shaped as a stag. China, Jingdezhen, 1662–1722.

Gemach, on the upper floor of the Royal Castle's west wing, originally belonged to the apartments of the Elector's mother, Princess Anna Sophie of Denmark (1647–1717). By the end of 1715, Augustus the Strong had partially furnished the room with porcelain, although the number of objects that were used is unknown. The Turkish Palace was a mansion located in the Italian Garden, a Baroque garden created from 1664 outside Dresden's city gate *Wilsdruffer Tor*. The name derives from its primary decoration in "Oriental" style, which also included porcelain.²⁹

In 1713, four years after he regained the Polish-Lithuanian crown,³⁰ Augustus began sending large quantities of Meissen and East Asian porcelain to Warsaw. It has not yet been determined to which of the Polish royal residences the objects were delivered, but the furnishing of his palace with precious materials indicates Augustus' ambition to further strengthen his influence in the domain by demonstrating his power through the display of wealth.³¹ He was faced with resistance from the Polish nobility after his attempt to deprive the Polish parliament of its power and establish an absolute monarchy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was probably this political tumult that galvanised Augustus the Strong into sending his porcelain back to Dresden as early as May 1715. Seven extensive packing lists describe the items that were returned to Saxony between May and October 1715. Fourteen crates were sent back to Dresden with a first shipment in May, but not all of them consisted of ceramics alone. The cargo also included valuable lacquer works, silverware, paintings, tapestries and other ornaments. Ten crates contained porcelain, lacquer objects and soapstone carvings, probably packed together for the sake of logistics and efficiency. Among them were objects that are still in the Porzellansammlung today, such as the figure of a stag with detachable antlers, glazed green with brown and yellow accents, which is described in the packing list as being "a green stag of Turkish porcelain" (fig. 4).³² Two other objects that could be identified as being in the royal porcelain collection from as early as 1715 are "2 pyramids with spouts, blue and white", which could be used as tulip holders (figs. 5 and 6).³³

It is difficult to specify the exact number of East Asian porcelains that returned to Dresden, because the packing lists do not always explicitly state the objects' material or origin. However, it can be determined that the 14 crates in the first consignment contained 1222 objects; at least 985 of them porcelain. Of the crates that returned to Dresden with the second consignment in June, only crate no. 4 as well as a *coffre* (chest) contained at least 151 porcelain objects, mostly smaller items such as plates or slop bowls. All in all, at least 1136 porcelain items were moved to Dresden between May and June 1715. That the relocation did not happen without damages or even losses can be construed from side notes on the packing lists, most likely added while the crates were being unpacked in Dresden. These remarks are written in a different handwriting from



Fig. 5. Tulip holder. China, Jingdezhen, 1662–1722.



Fig. 6. Tulip holder. China, Jingdezhen, 1662–1722.

the main list, and comment on the objects' condition or breakages. For example, a note regarding the "pyramids" mentioned above states: "the spouts [...] are damaged".³⁴ In other cases, the author comments on missing covers, partial or complete breakage, or missing items such as "two small boxes with broken porcelain", which "have not been found".³⁵

Along with the returns from Warsaw, the year 1715 saw further additions of porcelain to the royal collection. In September, Augustus the Strong acquired an assortment of artworks and porcelain from General Field Marshal Flemming, a total of 494 objects, of which at least 433 were made of porcelain.³⁶ The specification explains that the porcelain was originally kept on seven fully gilded wooden *étagères*.³⁷ It is unknown whether Flemming accumulated his collection systematically. However, the detailed description of the arrangement of porcelain into assemblies suggests that a "concept of selective grouping"³⁸ was applied to the presentation of the objects. About two years after the acquisition of porcelain from General Field Marshal Flemming, Augustus the Strong purchased the Dutch Palace from him, which would become the central repository for the royal porcelain collection.

3.2 Acquisitions after 1717³⁹

The Dutch Palace was opened with an extravagant ceremony on 15 August 1717, for which the palace needed to be furnished accordingly. The interior decoration was in the hands of Baron Raymond Le Plat (ca. 1664–1742), interior architect and general inspector of the royal Saxon collections. Numerous pieces were therefore added to the royal porcelain collection in the Dutch Palace in the years prior to 1717, either from stock already in Dresden, or from new acquisitions abroad. On 19 May 1717, Le Plat received the order from Augustus the Strong to relocate 72 porcelain objects from the Green Vault to the Dutch Palace, mostly smaller items such as bowls, pots, and only one garniture consisting of five vases.⁴⁰ Likewise, the porcelain acquisitions made by Count Lagnasco, which had arrived in Dresden in 70 crates and barrels early in April 1717 and amounted to at least 819 objects, were probably taken to the Dutch Palace soon after their arrival, just like the second delivery of at least 1125 porcelains, and 84 lacquer and stoneware objects, which found their way to the Palace on 20 June 1718 (see chapter 11.1).

A well-known addition to the collection came in 1717 in form of 151 porcelain items, among them 13 "Dragoon vases", which Augustus the Strong had received from the Prussian king, Frederick William I (1688–1740) in exchange for 600 soldiers. In the same year, 90 vases, bowls and plates were acquired from Oranienburg Palace.⁴¹

The years between 1718 and 1722 still constitute a major gap in the history of the development of the royal porcelain collection. This is due to the fact that there are no more *Schatullenkasse* receipts after 1718, and no further delivery or acquisition documents have come to light from this period. At least 5342 porcelain objects were in Dresden by the end of 1718, although it is not known whether all of them were kept in the Dutch Palace.

The Palace Inventory – which lists its complete interior contents, including the holdings of East Asian and Meissen porcelain – was created between 1721 and at least 1727.⁴² Besides the objects' numbers, descriptions and dimensions, it also contains information about acquisition dates and dealers, but only for pieces that entered the collection from late 1721 until the last extant entries in May 1727. From an analysis of the Palace Inventory, it can be assumed that around 16,000 East Asian porcelain objects were already in royal possession before 1722, a number that would rise to at least 25,000 objects by 1727.⁴³ How and by whom the remaining objects were acquired in the four years between 1718 and 1722 is still unknown and a desideratum for further research.