

ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES FROM THE SLOANE  
COLLECTION IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

SIR HANS SLOANE was what our grandparents would have called a 'born collector'! Evelyn mentions his collection of curiosities as early as 1691, when he must have been thirty-one. He was still collecting at the time of his death in 1753, when he was over ninety.

The oriental objects, which came to the British Museum from his collection, are trivial in themselves, but they are of absorbing interest because of the documentation attached to them. For they illustrate the kind of oriental material available in England in the early years of the eighteenth century and they throw an amusing light on the history of collecting in that period and on the personality of Sloane himself.

Sir Hans Sloane's taste in natural history specimens has been commemorated by Pope and drew irreverent comment from Horace Walpole. To his taste in other directions, we find Young referring contemptuously in his *Satires*, in the words: 'Sloane, the foremost toyman of his time.' The descriptions of some of the oriental items in the manuscript catalogue of his miscellanies make entertaining reading today. One wonders whether item No. 13 'A hatt of the Patriarch of China made of canes split on the outside and lin'd with plantain leaves', or No. 272, 'A case made of bambo lacquer'd in Japan wherein are five Chinese instruments of faether ear-pickers &c. for tickling the ears' excited the derision or interest of Horace Walpole. He was himself an indefatigable collector of curiosities and he could ill afford to throw stones! Unfortunately, the Sloane manuscript does not tell us the dates at which Sloane made his purchases, although it does occasionally reveal the small sums of money which he paid for them, and the names of the merchants and travellers from whom he bought them. But the watermarks on the paper and particulars known of a few of the acquisitions make it probable that items numbered up to 910 were acquired before about 1718, while the Kaempfer collection is listed under Nos. 1063-82, and 1139-94, giving a date of before 1723 for the items listed between these numbers. In that year Sloane paid 450 crowns for those 'curiosities'.

More unfortunately still, the register of his collection does not show which items actually reached the Museum, and the only means of identifying these pieces, apart from the very inadequate descriptions in his Catalogue, is from the small paper labels with ink numbers corresponding to those in the Catalogue, which Sloane attached to them. The greater part of these have been rubbed off.

No record of the objects which were incorporated in the Museum collection seems to have been preserved. Their identification evidently exercised the judgement of Sir Wollaston Franks; for there is a note on the fly-leaf of the register, almost certainly in his handwriting, which reads: 'the objects marked

A. W. F. with a date [the years in the margin are 1853, 1854, and 1855] have been identified and the Sloane numbers painted on them.' But there is reason to believe that when the original Sloane labels were lacking, Sir Wollaston was sometimes mistaken in his attributions.

Among the Chinese and Japanese objects in the register are a number of pieces of pottery and porcelain, which can be identified without any doubt. These include a pair of Chinese unglazed biscuit figures (nos. 1054 and 1055) described as 'A Chinese earthen ware figure of a woman sitting with a scroll in her hand, white and not glazed. From Mr. van Mildert' and 'The same with a pott in her hand. Id'. The figures are in fact Buddhist Arhats or Lohan, and the second one (Pl. VI, fig. 4), a representation of Bodhidharma. Underneath both pieces is the stamp of the potter Chiang Ming-Kao,<sup>1</sup> who must have lived in the K'ang Hsi period (1662-1722).

Another charming little piece of K'ang Hsi biscuit (Pl. VI, Fig. 5) No. 922 in the Register, retaining its original label, is described laconically as 'a Cock in China'; but it actually represents a phoenix on a rock surrounded with peonies in high relief, covered with green, yellow, and aubergine glazes. A wine ewer in the form of a peach, with a turquoise glaze (Sloane 149), a pair of Kuan type crackled dishes (Nos. 1492 and 1493) with spur marks on the base, and probably a celadon vase (? No. 422), described as 'A sort of China ware, which admits of no poison but it immediately breaks', are other Chinese ceramics in the Museum originally from this collection. Among the Japanese pieces are a pair of small Arita incense vases on feet (Nos. 1056 and 1057) (Pl. VI, Fig. 6). The lid of one of them has been lost. They are decorated with wisteria blossoms in black and gold and are described in the register as 'ink potts'. There are also three pottery Japanese tea bowls, covered with a greenish-brown glaze, splashed with white slip on the outside, which are probably Yatshushiro ware. They are called in the register 'Chinese basons'. But No. 1704, 'A very large Japan earthen bason with yellow and blew marke and figures—very ancient', alas! remains unidentified.

The Sloane collection was very rich in Chinese soapstone carvings and some fourteen specimens in the Museum's collections almost certainly come from this source, although only four still possess Sloane labels, one of which is indecipherable. It is therefore difficult to place with certainty No. 184 in the Catalogue, 'a cup of gray soft stone or past with trees cutt on the pedestal from China, a little broken on the edge bought of Mr. Penfold. 2/6'. But No. 1174 'a Chinese man sitting in an elbow chair twirling up his long black beard commonly thought to be done in rice past or a sort of alabaster' is illustrated, although it has lost its original label (Pl. VI, Fig. 2). This is from the Kaempfer collection.

The Department would find it difficult to produce No. 1156, 'A Japan idol of sloth sitting. From Dr. Kaempfer' or No. 7, 'A sword from China worn there

by Father Fontaney who gave it to me'. This man was a Jesuit priest, who returned from China in 1720. But a Persian or Indian dagger handle No. 201 described as 'jasper, with yellow and blackish brown undulated veins from the East Indies' and No. 1267 'a Turkish knife, with an inlaid handle, from Dr. Cowell' (a true description at last!) could be produced by the Department.

The Department also has on exhibition a Chinese carved ivory head (No. 1120) (Pl. VI, Fig. 3), a group of two Chinese carved ivory figures (? No. 1004) and four carved rhinoceros horn cups,<sup>2</sup> three Chinese and one Indian, from the same collection, but only two of these (No. 143 and No. 1713) possess their original labels. Also on exhibition are a group of six poorly carved male Chinese deities in wood and a stag, two of which have their original Sloane labels. One of these, No. 1182 (Pl. VI, Fig. 1) is rather inadequately described as 'an old woman with a fann in her left hand tickling her ears cutt in wood'. It would be difficult to believe that these pieces were made before 1716, when Kaempfer died, if it were not for their pedigree.

SOAME JENYNS

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Hobson, *Handbook*, p. 173.

August 1939, pl. ii, C and D, opposite p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Two of these are reproduced by Wolfgang Born in an article 'More Eastern objects formerly in the Hapsburg collections', *Burlington Magazine*, The gilded cup is probably No. 1142 and was acquired by Dr. Kaempfer in Japan.

## SLOANE AND THE KAEMPFER COLLECTION

IT is probable that when Sir Hans Sloane received the papers and collections of the late Dr. Engelbert Kaempfer in 1723-5, the Chinese colour-prints which they included did not seem to him among the most important part. Yet to the Department of Oriental Antiquities, where they are now preserved, and to students of Chinese, and also Japanese, woodcuts, they appear of unique importance, because of their rarity and beautiful condition; and because of the early date which can be presumed for them.

Dr. Kaempfer was a young man in his early thirties when he was attached as a doctor to a Swedish embassy to the Persian court. After his business there was concluded, in spite of a severe attack of fever, he was set on further travels and signed on with the Dutch East India Co., to make the voyage to the Far East. He sailed, via Malabar, Ceylon, and Sumatra, to Batavia, botanizing on the way. From there he joined the annual voyage to Japan. After touching at Siam, he reached Japan on 20 November 1690. He was to spend just two years there, twice making the annual journey to the Shogun's court at Edo. But most of his time he spent with his Dutch colleagues on the island of Deshima at Nagasaki to which they were confined by the strict orders of the régime.

It was the Genroku period in Japan (1688-1704) when the Tokugawa régime, under the Shogun Tsunayoshi, was still flourishing and taste was at its

most luxurious. Moreover, interest in Chinese art and culture was encouraged by the authorities for its Confucian colour, and was exploited by Chinese merchants. However, since 1688, the Chinese traders too were compelled to visit only Nagasaki and were there also confined to a secluded factory on the mainland, although it enjoyed the advantage of a beautiful garden.

Dr. Kaempfer was thus able to acquire specimens of Chinese books and prints as well as Japanese, and it is not surprising that among them are examples of the elaborate colour-prints in an art invented in China in the seventeenth century, in which the Japanese took the greatest interest; for it was to lead with them in due course to a far wider use of the process during the eighteenth century.

The botanist's eye would have naturally been caught by the beautiful rendering of blossom in these woodcuts, which were among the rich collections he brought back to Lemgow.

He had looked forward to preparing all this material for a History of Japan, and he set about this task. But marriage and fame as a doctor left him little leisure and when he died at the age of sixty-five, in November 1716, the work was still not ready for the press.

Sir Hans Sloane soon heard of the death of this well-known botanist and traveller, and he commissioned George I's Hanoverian doctor, Steigerthal, at the next opportunity to discover what was to become of his library and collections. Very soon a sale of the whole to Sloane was arranged with his widow and nephew, and in 1723-5 all this material was transferred to Sir Hans's home in London. No doubt he had promised to have the *History of Japan* published, and he kept his word handsomely, having it translated into English at his own expense by his librarian, Dr. Scheuchzer. It appeared in 1727 under the aegis of the Royal Society, and with the imprimatur of Sloane as President.

Among Kaempfer's papers were preserved until 1905 a series of Chinese woodcuts, mounted in an album in the Department of Manuscripts, numbered Additional 5052, and lettered on the spine 'Japanese and Chinese pictures: e mss. E. Kempfer'. Inside is inserted a notice, which that department believes to be in the hand of James Emson, who was employed in Sloane's library shortly before his death in 1753: 'Drawings of Japanese Temples: done by the Japanese themselves, all brought from there by Dr. Engelbert Kaempfer—Baskets of several fruits and flowers from China.'

The first part of these contents are referred to in the Introduction to Kaempfer's *History of Japan* (ed. Macle hose, 1906, i, p. lxxxix),<sup>1</sup> as 'Views of the elaborate Temples, Castles and other Buildings of the Japanese, to the number of fifty, done by the Natives in watercolours', and since this album appears to have been bound in England between 1720 and 1730, there is a strong presumption that the whole of the contents were in fact from Kaempfer's collection. Apart from the woodcuts, these consist of appliquéés, models of flowers, and

figures in silk brocade and embroidery, some Chinese and some Japanese. This is just the kind of thing which Kaempfer might have purchased at Nagasaki in 1691-2.

The woodcuts were taken out of this album and transferred to the Oriental Prints and Drawings in 1906, and were duly included in the Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese woodcuts in that Department, by Laurence Binyon, in 1916 (pp. 581-6, nos. 21-49).

A good deal more is now known about the history of Chinese woodcuts than then, and it is possible to add something to the factual description there given. We now know that the first books illustrated with woodcuts from multiple blocks were produced in China in 1606. The principal centres of this late Ming art were in Anhui, and at Nanking, Hangchow, and Soochow in the Yangtze coastal area. It was essentially a late Ming art developed only in quite small circles of scholar-officials; and it reached its height in the publications of the Ten Bamboo Studio (*Shih-chu-chai: Shu Hua P'u*)<sup>2</sup> between the years 1619 and 1633. Although the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 spelt the decline of this art, it seems to have continued in the centres of Nanking and Soochow for some years after that date. It is probable that the Kaempfer prints were all produced at Soochow for, although they fall into five groups according to their subjects, they are all linked together both by technical similarity and also by the fact that all the prints which include any printed characters are signed by one of two artists of the Ting<sup>3</sup> family, Ting-Liang-hsien, and Ting Ying-tsung, while on four<sup>4</sup> it is stated that he was an artist of Soochow. These also state that they were both composed and executed by the same man, and this seems to imply that they are his original drawings. We do not know the name of the woodcutter or of the printer, but no place had a higher reputation for printing in China at this time.<sup>5</sup> As to date the only indication we have is that they must be earlier than 1691: but the blocks seem to be a little worn, and they may therefore be attributed to the early part of the K'ang-hsi period, which commenced in 1662. The rose which is the most striking colour in these prints is the same shade which gives its name to the *famille rose* porcelain, but it is of course not an enamel pigment and not of the same composition. Still, such prints as these were undoubtedly used by the porcelain decorators as their models, and a slightly earlier date is therefore to be expected for them.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion it must be added that these are not the only Chinese woodcuts in the Sloane collection. A further series, now also in the Oriental Antiquities Department, were mounted in albums numbered Sloane Add. 5292-3, which are recorded as comprising material collected by James Cunningham, who can be identified as having lived from 1700 to 1702 at Amoy in south China. These prints are rendered in a low key, blue, aubergine, yellow, and dull green, and depict landscape scenes as well as trees and birds. They also can be connected

with Soochow, but seem to be of earlier date and may well be before the end of the Ming Dynasty in 1644.

BASIL GRAY

<sup>1</sup> Also in a MS. list in Sl. 4019, f. 54.  
<sup>2</sup> For the complicated bibliographical history of this book, see Robert T. Paine, 'The Ten Bamboo Studio, its early editions, pictures and artists', in *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, v (1951), 39.

China see K. T. Wu: 'Ming Printing and Printers' in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 7 (1942), p. 202; and 'Colour Printing in the Ming Dynasty', in *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, Aug.-Sept. 1940, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> This series of prints is extremely rare and the book in which they were originally published has not been traced. A few other impressions are known including five acquired by the Museum in 1932. See *B.M.Q.* vii. 36.

<sup>3</sup> 丁亮允  
丁應宗

<sup>4</sup> L.B. Cat., nos. 45-48.

<sup>5</sup> For the development of colour-printing in

#### *Description of the Two Colour Prints Illustrated (Plate VII)*

1. Basket of lotus flowers, tiger lilies and pomegranates. Size: 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

The verse reads:

'Lotus flowers and lotus leaves filling a basket  
The delicate beauty of a few blossoms of the tender lotus.  
By Ting Liang-hsien.'

The translation of the second line is to be preferred to that given in the 1916 Catalogue under No. 27.

2. Bird with yellow breast and blue wings and tail perched on guelder rose. Size: 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

The verse reads:

'These round clustered forms might be made of jade from the mountains of Ch'u.  
Their radiance mirrors the bliss of wedded women.

Liang-hsien.'

These lines were not translated in the 1916 Catalogue, where the print is described under no. 40.

### THE SLOANE COLLECTION: ETHNOGRAPHY

SLOANE'S varied interests embraced the so-called 'artificial curiosities' of remote and primitive peoples, which we now call ethnographical. While these interests were subsidiary, and the specimens numerically few in comparison with those relating to natural history, they were significant in providing a basis for subsequent growth and in establishing ethnography's title to inclusion in the British Museum from its first foundation. Had this nucleus not existed it is open to doubt whether the Museum would have benefited, as it did, from the ethnographical harvest accruing from the voyages of discovery of Capt. Cook and others, which occurred within fifteen years of the Museum's establishment. The fact remains that Sloane's collection contained the germ, itself not inconsiderable, which was destined to grow into one of the finest collections of ethnography in the world today.

Of the 2,111 items<sup>1</sup> listed in the 'Miscellanies' section of Sloane's catalogue,