

Inspiration and imitation: Japanese Kakiemon to Meissen to Doccia

European porcelain factories were inspired by wares from the East over many decades of the 18th century. This inspiration often manifested itself in pure imitation. This inspiration and imitation also took place between different European factories, and herein rests the tale that follows.

The subject piece of this paper (1), a dish from the early period of the Doccia factory at the villa in Sesto Fiorentino near Florence, of its founder, Marchese Carlo Ginori, was made in c.1750 in hard paste porcelain, and closely copied a Meissen example of a decade or two earlier. The irony of this is that Meissen had itself imitated a Japanese Kakiemon-style decoration of the late 17th century. Comparison of extant examples of the decoration reveals how closely this imitation was carried out in each case. Another Doccia example of this design may be found in Ginori Lisci (1963).¹



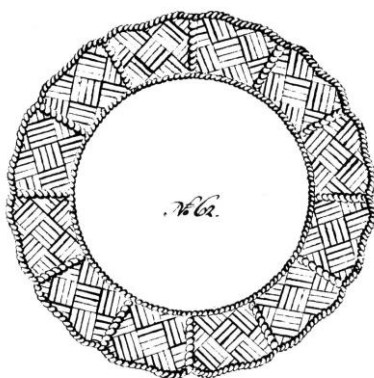
1. Doccia dish decorated in polychrome enamels and gilding with *Ho-o* bird, banded-hedge, and flowering tree peony decoration, and a lobed rim moulded with basketweave panels, hard paste porcelain, c.1750, D 22.6 cm. Private collection.

The features of the shape, moulding and decoration of this Doccia dish were copied from an earlier Meissen example, revealing a striking faithfulness to the Meissen original. An example of a Meissen plate in this form is to be found in the Wark Collection. (2) Aside from the close similarity in the polychrome decoration between the Doccia and Meissen examples, Doccia also copied the moulded form of the German factory's piece.



2. Meissen dinner plate, c.1735, D 23.5 cm. The Wark Collection, Cummer Museum, Jacksonville, Florida, USA (AG2000.2.374)²

The lobed rim (marli) moulding with a basketweave pattern divided into twelve compartments or panels in the Doccia dish echoes the Meissen in every detail. This rim pattern (3) was designed by the head modeller at Meissen, Johann Joachim Kändler, in 1735, and used in the production of an important commission of a dinner service for Count Alexander Joseph Graf von Sulkowski (1695-1762), a cabinet minister of the Kings of Saxony and Poland, Augustus II (The Strong) and Augustus III, before he was dismissed in 1738. (4) Thus this moulded pattern is referred to as the Sulkowski pattern. The decoration around the rims of both the Meissen and Doccia dishes of *Indianische Blumen* is a purely European feature and introduced by J.G. Höroldt at Meissen soon after 1720.³



3. Drawing of the Meissen plate design in the Sulkowski pattern designed by Johann Joachim Kändler in 1735.⁴



4. Meissen plate from the Sulkowski service with the Sulkowski armorial, c.1735-8, D 23.5 cm. ©The Trustees of the British Museum (Franks.91)

Meissen also produced plates and dishes with the *Ho-o* bird, banded-hedge and flowering tree peony decoration without the Sulkowski pattern rims. (5) These were close copies of Japanese Kakiemon dishes of the late 17th century in both form and decoration. (6) Thus, the decoration of the subject Doccia dish is traceable back to its Japanese origins through the Meissen factory production.



5. Meissen dish, c.1725-30, D 21 cm. Arnhold Collection, New York (2004.537)⁵



6. Japanese Arita Kakiemon-style decorated dish, late 17th century, D 20.2 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (EA1985.34)⁶

The decorative motifs in this design include several meaningful details. The tree peony growing up from behind one of the banded hedges is probably copied from Chinese wares of the Kangxi period (1662-1722), and is purely decorative in its Japanese context. The peony in China is the King of Flowers, but it does not have that lofty status in Japan, where the cherry blossom is more lauded. The banded brushwood hedges, the rocks and the *Ho-o* bird are familiar features of Kakiemon designs.

The *Ho-o* bird, often wrongly called a phoenix in the West, is the Japanese equivalent of the Chinese *fêng-huang*, a composite of other creatures including swallow, tortoise, pheasant and peacock. It is common on all classes of Japanese ceramics. Furthermore, in Japan, it is a symbol of wisdom and energy and an inhabitant of Paradise, the heaven of 'purple clouds and great visions', to which the dying Buddhist hopes to go.⁷

There is no suggestion that this degree of meaning was carried through to the European decoration at Meissen and Doccia, but it is worthy to draw attention to the vibrancy of the Doccia palette on the subject dish. The shades of green are particularly striking. The paste/glaze of this dish is rather grey, in contrast to the whiteness of Meissen porcelain of the time, and it may be argued that the greyness gives the Doccia dish a distinctive quality further enhanced by the bright palette of enameled decoration. These are matters of taste that shall no doubt remain the subject of debate, however, it surely takes nothing away from the success of the Doccia enterprise with regard to its artistic achievement at a time when hard paste porcelain production in Europe was still in its early development, especially in Italy.

The essential elements of the Kakiemon original design were faithfully carried through to the decoration of the Meissen and Doccia dishes, and are undoubtedly as successful aesthetically in the European context as in the Japanese examples from which the design originated.

Patrick Hagglund, July 2021

Acknowledgements

For reading my text and making two important corrections, as well as suggesting some bibliographical references, I thank Livia Frescobaldi, President, *Associazione Amici di Doccia*, Florence, Italy.

Notes

¹ Ginori Lisci, Leonardo, *La porcellana di Doccia* (Florence: Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, 1963), *Tav.XI* and p.138.

² Pietsch, Ulrich, *Early Meissen Porcelain: The Wark Collection* (London: D Giles Ltd., 2011), p.275, Cat.273.

³ Savage, George and Newman, Harold, *An illustrated dictionary of ceramics* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), pp.156-7.

⁴ Röntgen, R. E., *The Book of Meissen* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1996), pp.166-7.

⁵ Cassidy-Geiger, Maureen, et al, *The Arnhold Collection of Meissen Porcelain 1710-50* (London: D Giles Ltd., 2008), p.512, Cat.240.

⁶ Impey, Oliver, *Japanese export porcelain: Catalogue of the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2002), p.145, Cat.201.

⁷ Arts, P.L.W., *Japanese porcelain: A collector's guide to general aspects and decorative motifs* (Lochem, The Netherlands: De Tijdstroom, 1983), pp.132-3.

Postscript

The Doccia factory remained in the Ginori family until 1896, when it was incorporated into Società Richard of Milan under the name of Richard-Ginori. Recent history has seen the factory and the museum, Museo di Doccia, close under threat of disintegration. The museum closed in 2014. The multinational company, Kering, came to the rescue in purchasing the factory in Sesto Fiorentino and restarting porcelain production, but did not acquire the museum and its historical collections. The Friends of Doccia, *Amici di Doccia*, campaign and fundraise to save the future of the museum and works towards its eventual re-opening. In 2017, the Italian State through the Ministry for Culture purchased the museum and its priceless collection of ceramics, moulds and documents for the nation. This momentous event promises to see the saving of the collections in perpetuity and the eventual re-opening of the Museo di Doccia.

Membership of the *Amici di Doccia* is open to all interested parties at reasonable subscription rates, see: <https://amicididoccia.it/en/association/#aderire2>.

The group produces a journal each year entitled *Quaderni Amici di Doccia*. This is a handsome paperback publication with papers published in both Italian and in English, with updates on restoration work on the collection, progress reports with regard to the museum and on Doccia pieces in major museum collections around the World, etc. The journal is sent free of charge each year to all paid up members of *Amici di Doccia*.

