

Unveiling the Provenance: Exploring the Earliest Donations of East Asian Objects in Slovenia

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Astract

This paper offers an insight into the earliest museum donations of East Asian objects in the area of present-day Slovenia. A special focus is given to the donations of porcelain by noblewomen donors in the first half of the 19th century, notably in the year 1833. It expands on their backgrounds and biographies, as well as tries to determine the circumstances in which they acquired and were able to donate or bequest Japanese and Chinese porcelain (and in some cases other ceramics of East Asian origin) to museum collections. The earliest donations are presented through in-depth studies of *Illyrisches Blatt*, a weekly supplement to the paper *Laibacher Zeitung*, where, in the first half of the 19th century, all donations to the Provincial Museum of Carniola (*Krainisches Landesmuseum*; today the National Museum of Slovenia) were recorded. Through the identification of Asian objects and donors, a curious situation relating to several woman donors of East Asian porcelain is uncovered. The paper also presents these donors and offers an analysis of the objects they donated.

Keywords: provenance research, object donations, noble donors, women donors, East Asian objects, East Asian porcelain

Razkrivanje provenience: raziskovanje najzgodnejših donacij vzhodnoazijskih predmetov v Sloveniji

Izvleček

Pričujoči prispevek ponuja vpogled v najzgodnejše muzejske donacije vzhodnoazijskih predmetov na območju današnje Slovenije. Poseben poudarek je namenjen donacijam vzhodnoazijskega porcelana, ki so ga darovale plemkinje v prvi polovici 19. stoletja, zlasti leta 1833. V prispevku so predstavljeni tudi njihovo ozadje in biografije ter poskus raziskovanja okoliščin, v katerih so pridobile in lahko darovale japonski ter kitajski porcelan (in v nekaterih primerih druge keramike vzhodnoazijskega izvora) muzejskim zbirkam. Najzgodnejše donacije so predstavljene s poglobljenimi študijami *Illyrisches Blatt*, tedenske priloge časopisa *Laibacher Zeitung*, kjer so bile v prvi polovici 19. stoletja zabeležene vse donacije Kranjskemu deželnemu muzeju (*Krainisches Landesmuseum*; danes

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Narodni muzej Slovenije). Z identifikacijo vzhodnoazijskih predmetov in donatorjev se je v raziskavi razkrila zanimiva situacija več donatork, ki so muzeju istega leta podarile vzhodnoazijski porcelan. Prispevek te donatorke tudi predstavi in analizira predmete, ki so jih darovale in jih še danes hrani muzej.

Ključne besede: raziskovanje provenience, donacije predmetov, plemiči kot darovalci, ženske darovalke, vzhodnoazijski predmeti, vzhodnoazijski porcelan

Introduction

Many objects of East Asian origin that we encounter in Slovene museums today were brought to the area of present-day Slovenia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century by sailors, missionaries, diplomats, scientific researchers and travellers who visited East Asia mostly in the scope of their work, via Austria's official maritime expeditions (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2019, 93). Many of these kinds of objects have a provenance that is quite clear, and by this point, well-researched. The objects were exhibited, written about in several scientific articles and included in exhibition catalogues.

However, when researching East Asian collections in Slovene museums, we relatively often still encounter a lack of proper documentation about some of the objects. It may be missing or considered lost, and the available data often lacks basic information about the objects, such as the place of origin. We can more or less successfully tackle these issues through the study of existing information and supplement it with older sources, publications and older documentation, as well as primary research on the objects themselves (such as the shape, material and type of decoration). The last of these especially can help a lot with determining the origin of individual objects. Such is also the case with the East Asian objects in the collections of the National Museum of Slovenia. Objects of East Asian origin housed in the various collections of what is today the National Museum of Slovenia are examples of objects where the provenance is often unclear or missing.

This paper offers an analysis of the earliest museum donations of East Asian objects in Slovenia with a special focus on the donations of porcelain by noblewomen donors in the first half of the 19th century. The first part clearly presents the entries of especially East Asian object donations as they were published in a special column entitled "Landes-Museum in Laibach" in *Illyrisches Blatt*,¹ a culturally oriented weekly supplement to the paper *Laibacher Zeitung* (Kos 2017, 154; 2020, 19–20).

1 After the discontinuation of *Illyrisches Blatt* in 1849, the museum acquisitions were no longer published until the launch of the museum journal *Argo* by Alfons Müllner in 1892 (Kos 2020, 19). For the next 11 years, at least until 1903, new museum acquisitions were occasionally published there.

Since each contribution included the donor's name and a remark about the object they provided, these publications serve as a primary source of information for studying the East Asian objects that were presented to the museum in the first half of the 19th century. All of the editions of *Illyrisches Blatt* that mention donations of East Asian objects from the first half of the 19th century are used as primary material in researching object provenances and determining the last owners—donors to the museum. As mentioned, a special emphasis is given to female donors, who marked a notably rich year in terms of donations, as all of them donated East Asian porcelain pieces in 1833. The latter part of the paper thus emphasises these donors and their stories, and includes a detailed analysis of the objects they donated and that are still kept today in the Ceramics Collection of the National Museum of Slovenia. When possible, the entries are also supported with photographic examples of the objects, which are mentioned in the publications of *Illyrisches Blatt*.

Stitching together a timeline from the objects' first records and later documentation, as well as in-depth analysis of the objects themselves and comparisons with similar objects kept at other museums, can give us an interesting insight into the provenance and especially into the people who used to own them. Old publications can also provide valuable information about an object's history, including its ownership and, in the case of the National Museum of Slovenia, the time of acquisition of the objects. However, due to the general and less detailed nature of the entries, it is sometimes not possible to connect a specific entry to one specific object.

Illyrisches Blatt and the Earliest Donations of East Asian Objects

In 1821, the Estate Museum of Carniola was established and five years later it was renamed the Provincial Museum of Carniola or *Krainisches Landesmuseum* by a directive from the emperor himself. Soon after the museum's establishment, in 1823, the governor of Carniola Josef Kamilo Schmidburg sent a formal letter to his "homeland's friends of science" (*An die Literatoren und Freunde der Wissenschaften in Krain*) asking them to donate objects for the new museum (Kos 2020, 19–20).² In this way, donating antiques, documents and artefacts also became an expression of patriotic consciousness and a source of pride, as well as a display of status.³ The first years of the museum's existence were mainly devoted to the ac-

2 It should be added, that while the letter was addressing the people of the Carniola region, some donors to the museum also lived in other regions that are today part of Slovenia.

3 An important fact that needs to be pointed out is that the museum not only received donations from inhabitants of Carniola but also from other regions at the time within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Within this paper, the donors, according to the current information, lived in the area of present-day Slovenia.

quisition of different materials and objects and the formation of collections. The first exhibition was only opened 10 years after its establishment, on 4th October 1831. Within the scope of this exhibition, greater emphasis was mainly placed on the natural sciences (for example, a rich array of minerals) (ibid., 20).

Starting in the same year, the museum published all monetary donations and object acquisitions in a special column entitled “Landes-Museum in Laibach” in *Illyrisches Blatt*, a culturally oriented weekly supplement to the paper *Laibacher Zeitung* (Kos 2017, 154; 2020, 19–20). The column was written by Franz Count von Hochenwart (full name Franz Josef Hannibal Count von Hochenwart; 1771–1844), director of a special museum curatorium (essentially, the head of the museum) (Frelih 2022, 77) and donor, and published irregularly several times a year until 1849. From 1836 to 1845, the column was renamed *Verzeichniß* (“Directory”, sometimes spelt *Verzeichniss*) or “*Verzeichniß (or Verzeichniss) der eingegangenen Museal-Geschenke*”, which translates as “List of received museum gifts”. In 1846, it was entitled *Fortsetzung des Verzeichnisses* (“Continuation of the directory”). These publications are the main source of data for analysing the donations of East Asian objects to the museum in the first half of the 19th century as every donation was recorded, including the name of the donor and a note on what they donated.

By analysing published acquisitions from the first half of the 19th century, we can see that donors and collectors also saw objects of East Asian origin as worthy of being donated and exhibited by the first museum established in the area of present-day Slovenia. We can see that since the establishment of the museum and until 1849, the institution received several hundred objects, including East Asian objects with an emphasis on porcelains (and other ceramics) (Kos 2017, 153–54).

With the acquisition of various objects, including porcelains, of East Asian origin, the museum and its staff were eventually faced with another dilemma. As Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik notes:

The acquisition of these objects confronted the museum staff with the conceptual problem of where to place them within the existing taxonomy of their institution and, thereby, also with questions relating to the interpretation of non-European objects. Should they be labelled as ‘art’ in recognition of their aesthetic value or did they belong, rather, to the field of ethnography or anthropology since they could show how people lived in another region of the world. (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2021, 87)

In her work, Vampelj Suhadolnik explores the criteria used to place the so-called non-European (more specifically East Asian) objects into the categories of “ethnology” and “cultural history”. A thorough analysis of the first published museum guide (Deschmann 1888) shows that the main criterion for differentiating between those two categories was, interestingly, provenance rather than origin. East Asian objects were therefore divided into two categories, which was underlined by the fact that they were displayed separately. East Asian porcelains were exhibited in a special room along with other examples of ceramics, such as majolica and European porcelain, which represented the category of “cultural history” rather than “ethnology”, as was the case with most other objects of non-European origin. It must be emphasised that the “cultural history” category largely comprised donations from notable members of the Carniolan aristocratic class. These objects not only included porcelain but also various other items. Meanwhile, the “ethnology” category consisted of objects sent and/or donated to the museum by missionaries working abroad. This suggests that the social status of the objects’ previous owners—members of the Carniolan elite—rather than the objects’ geographic origin played a key part in their categorisation as objects of ‘cultural history’ within the museum (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2021, 85).

Here we encounter what can be an interesting turn in the reception and perception of 19th-century porcelains in the area of present-day Slovenia. The (previous) owners of porcelains considered the objects’ origin to be most important⁴ and eventually (after the early 18th century), the porcelains’ origin became an important piece of information distinguishing pieces of East Asian and European origin. It seems that including and emphasising the fact that a piece of porcelain was made in either China or Japan “added value” to the object, and consequently, to the status of the last owner. The appreciation of East Asian porcelain made a clear distinction between objects of “ethnology” and objects of “cultural history”.

Upon reviewing the earliest documented museum donations, it was discovered that the very first East Asian object contributed to the collection of the museum was a Chinese coin by Mr. Wagner from Ljubljana:

Mr. Jos. Fried. Wagner from Ljubljana donated the following, from No. 71 - 114: [...] 84.) One Chinese coin. (Hochenwart 1832a, 10)⁵

4 As we can see from the records (for example, *Illyrisches Blatt* donation entries), they always specified the East Asian origins of porcelains—China or Japan (although often incorrectly, labelling Japanese pieces as Chinese and vice versa).

5 In German: “Herr Jos. Fried. Wagner aus Laibach, widmete Nachstenhendes, von Nr. 71 - 114. als: [...] 84.) Eine chinesische Münze.”

The full text of the donation recorded in *Illyrisches Blatt* in 1832 shows that it was part of a larger donation, consisting mainly of different types of coins and some other objects. While one small coin might not particularly stand out and could get lost among the others, it still marks an important milestone as the first recorded object of East Asian origin in the collections of today's National Museum of Slovenia or any museum collection in Slovenia in general.

The second recorded donation of an East Asian object, interestingly, came from a person named Joseph Wagner and it was recorded in the 6th issue of *Illyrisches Blatt*, also published in 1832. In this issue, several donations are attributed to Joseph Wagner. Following the donation of thirty-three “stuffed [taxidermied] birds” (*ausgestopfte Vögel*) and another donation of a “significant amount of minerals” (*eine bedeutende Zahl Mineralien*) (Hochenwart 1832b, 23), a separate donation under the same name is also recorded—a donation of Chinese writing paper:

238.) Mr. Joseph Wagner, Chinese writing paper. (Hochenwart 1832b, 23)⁶

As for additional information on the donor, the data provided is rather sparse. Matija Križnar (2022) notes that in the 96th issue of *Illyrisches Blatt* for the year 1847, a person named Johann Friedrich Wagner donated some significant *naturlia* to the museum. In that same work, he speculates that the person might be actually named “Wagner Joseph Friedrich” and he might have been a working apothecary in Ljubljana at the time (*ibid.*, 39). Current research does not show a prominent person named “Jos. Fried. Wagner” (most probably Joseph Friedrich Wagner) or Joseph Wagner living in Ljubljana at the time. However, we can confirm that a person of the same name made several donations to the museum in a rather short time-frame. However, due to the lack of additional information, we cannot yet confirm that all these donations were in fact made by the same person or what his position and profession at the time actually were.

At approximately the same time as the second East Asian object donation made by Wagner, another Chinese coin was donated, this time by Mr. Michael Pregl:

242.) Mr. Michael Pregl, one Chinese coin, [...]. (Hochenwart 1832b, 24)⁷

This entry is also found in the 6th issue of *Illyrisches Blatt* published in 1832. Further research shows that a person with the name of Michael Pregl or Miha

6 In German: “238.) Herr Joseph Wagner, chinesisches Schreib-papier.”

7 In German: “242.) Herr Michael Pregl, eine chinesische Münze, [...].”

Pregl (1791–1877) lived in Ljubljana at this time and he was a rather prominent person working in the area of business and culture. He had worked in Ljubljana since at least 1822 and was employed in various committees and societies that were active in the city. He was even awarded honorary citizenship in 1867 (Knjižnica Litija 2011–2014; Andrejka and Kidrič 2013). While there has not yet been a direct connection confirmed, we can at least safely assume that a person of high social standing who was deeply involved in the cultural scene of Ljubljana at the time could also be connected to museum donations of various objects.

There were two more donations of East Asian objects in 1832: A Chinese comb⁸ donated by Barbara Freyinn von Rechbach (active in the 19th century), and a donation of used Chinese paper:

A doctor of theology and public professor so highly honoured for patriotic philology, Mr. Jacob Supan, enriched the museum with the following gifts, for which I publicly thank him. [...] Two octavo⁹ sheets of Chinese paper, written on one side [...]. (Hochenwart 1832d, 61–62)¹⁰

The latter was donated, as indicated, by Jakob Zupan (or Jacob Supan) (1785–1852). As a young man, after his initial schooling, he was sent to Vienna, where he was ordained a priest and promoted to doctor of theology. He later returned to Ljubljana and became a chaplain. In 1815, he became a professor of the Old Testament at the Ljubljana seminary and a professor of Oriental languages¹¹ at the lyceum (Suhadolnik 1991). Due to the very particular description of his profession in the entry of *Illyrisches Blatt*, we can confirm Jakob Zupan as one of the earliest donors of East Asian objects to museum collections in Slovenia.

In the last issue of *Illyrisches Blatt* in 1832, we can find another interesting entry of a donation made by the noblewoman Magdalena Ruard (1781/1782–1858):

8 In German: “372.) Frau Barbara Freyinn von Rechbach, einen chinesischen Kamm.” (Hochenwart 1832c, 31)

9 The octave format or “octavo” (from the Latin *octo* meaning “eight”) is a traditional notebook and book format in which a sheet of paper was folded three times and thus broken into eight sheets. Since each sheet has two pages, the format results in 16 pages per sheet of paper.

10 In German: “Der um die vaterländische Philologie so hochverdiente Doctor der Theologie und öffentliche Professor, Herr Jacob Supan, bereicherte mit nachfolgenden Geschenken das Museum, wofür ich meinen Dank ihm öffentlich zolle. [...] Zwei Octav-Blätter chinesisches Papier, auf einer Seite beschrieben [...]”

11 Since the only languages he spoke, outside of European ones, were Hebrew and Arabic (Suhadolnik 1991), it is safe to assume that “Oriental languages” did not reach further than the Middle East.

1016) Lady Magdalena Ruard, [...] A fan skilfully carved from a tortoise shell, lined with gold and painted with various drawings and Chinese figures. (Hochenwart 1832e, 209)¹²

The rather detailed description of the object hints that the carved and painted fan may be of Chinese origin. At the moment, however, we cannot confirm whether the object is truly of East Asian origin or if it is of European make in *chinoiserie* style as the particular object itself has not yet been identified in the museum's collections.

1833: The Year of Porcelain Donations

East Asian porcelains began to appear on the published lists in issues of *Illyrisches Blatt* soon after the new acquisitions started to be published in the 1830s, together with the names of their original owners. Analysing the newspaper issues where new museum acquisitions were published, we discover that in the first half of the 19th century, there were six donations of East Asian porcelain made, and all of them were recorded in the same year: 1833. It is also interesting that out of the six donations of porcelains, only one was made by a male donor. This donation was published in the 20th issue of 1833 *Illyrisches Blatt* and reads:

127.) Mr. Heinrich Freyer [...] one genuine Japanese porcelain plate painted with flowers in colours and gilt; a genuine Chinese porcelain plate with bright colours and gold. (Hochenwart 1833a, 81–82)¹³

Heinrich Freyer (1802–1866) was a curator at the Provincial Museum in Ljubljana for twenty years, from 1832 until 1842, before he continued his career in the museum in Trieste, where he worked until 1864. His professional career and personal interests led him especially into the area of natural sciences (Križnar 2022). However, he undoubtedly recognised the major contribution East Asian porcelain made to the general museum collection. Also interesting is the fact that, even in the donation note, it is emphasised that he donated “genuine” pieces of Japanese and Chinese porcelain, a fact or distinction that was often not deemed important to collectors or donors of the time.

12 In German: “1016) Frau Magdalena Ruard, [...] Einen aus Schildkrötenschale künstlich geschitzten, mit Gold ausgelegten und verschiedenen Zeichnungen und chinesischen Figuren bemalten Fächer. [...]”

13 In German: “127.) Herr Heinrich Freyer [...] einen echt japanischen Porcellain-Teller mit Blumen in Farben und Gold gemahlt; einen echt chinesischen Porcellain-Teller mit bunten Farben und Gold.”

The majority of the porcelains discussed and shown below are today still part of the National Museum's collection. The ceramics of East Asian origin comprise only a smaller part of the larger Ceramics Collection¹⁴ kept at the National Museum of Slovenia; nonetheless, they still form one of the biggest collections of East Asian objects in the country. According to the latest research and identification, it consists of approximately¹⁵ 240 pieces of Chinese and Japanese origin. Of these, approximately two-thirds are of Chinese and one-third of Japanese origin. The majority of the pieces identified as either Chinese or Japanese in origin fall into the greater grouping of objects made specifically for export to Western (in this case European) markets.

(Noble)women Donors of East Asian Porcelain

The first notable female donor of porcelain is Lady Margareth Countess von Hohenwart (1762–1853). Today, she is mostly known as the wife of the well-known nobleman and scholar Franz Josef Hannibal Count von Hohenwart (1771–1844), who was the head of the museum's curatorial office in Ljubljana and, together with the above-mentioned curator Heinrich Freyer, he managed its operations as well. However, Margareth was also a notable noblewoman, even before her marriage to Hohenwart in 1796 (Preinfalk 2014, 52). She was born in the old noble family of Erberg, whose members were first ennobled in the 17th century, as Margaretha Felicitas Eleonora Henrica Erberg. Various members of this family were especially known for their intellectual prowess throughout the centuries and they produced a notable number of officials, (art) patrons, professors and researchers (especially among members who joined the Jesuit order) (ibid., 39). The cultural consciousness and awareness of Margareth may therefore not even be surprising as she was born and grew up in a family of scholars and officials and later married the director of the first museum in Carniola.

Over the years, the Hohenwarts gifted various pieces of Chinese porcelain to the Provincial Museum of Carniola. During the analysis of the documents, we can even discover that the first example of East Asian porcelain was donated to the museum by Margareth (Berdajs 2020). The donation was a coffee cup and saucer gifted by the Countess in 1833 (fig. 1). The museum acquisition was published in the 4th issue of *Illyrisches Blatt* and reads:

14 The Ceramics collection of the National Museum of Slovenia altogether consists of approximately 9662 objects (Kos 2015, 1), less than one-tenth of which are of East Asian origin. It is one of the oldest collections in the museum and especially rich in European-made porcelains from Great Britain, Hungary, Austria and Italy, as well as many pieces made by contemporary artists.

15 The number is approximate, as at the time of the writing of this thesis, new ceramics of East Asian origin were still being uncovered in the museum's storage.

36.) Mrs. Countess von Hohenwart, one Chinese porcelain coffee saucer out of porcelain [...]. (Hohenwart 1833b, 16)¹⁶



Figure 1. Cup and saucer with an oxen motif. China. Qing dynasty. 18th century. Gift from Frau Gräfinn von Hohenwart, 1833. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 15338a and 15338b, National Museum of Slovenia)

From the record alone, it is difficult to determine which of the saucers are recorded here. It is, however, very likely to be a Chinese cup and saucer set, as it is painted in *famille rose*. It bears a central motif of two oxen and a boy with a flute on both the cup and saucer. However, we cannot definitively confirm that these are the objects from the document without a more detailed description. Not all the pieces of Chinese porcelain donated to the museum by the Hohenwarts have been identified yet. However, from the information currently known, it is quite unusual and interesting to find that both the husband and his wife are cited as donors. For this reason, both can be considered among the owners (if not collectors) of East Asian porcelain in Slovenia.

16 In German: “36.) Frau Gräfinn von Hohenwart, eine chinesische Kaffeh-Tasse von Porcellain [...]”

The second example presented refers to a recorded entry of a new acquisition published in the same 4th issue of 1833's *Illyrisches Blatt*. In the “Landes-Museum in Laibach” category, the 38th entry records the following:

38.) Frau Louise Edle von Lehman, a very pretty, colourfully painted, octagonal bowl with saucer, made of Japanese porcelain.¹⁷ (Hochenwart 1833b, 4)

The question of who Frau Louise Edle von Lehman was can be at least partially answered by researching old Carniolan noble families and their family trees. The aforementioned “Louise” was most possibly Alojzija von Lehmann (née Baroness Zoïs Edle von Edelstein) (1785–1854) who married her cousin's son Janez von Lehmann (1788–1831) in 1814. In 1820, Janez von Lehmann and his wife Alojzija, in an attempt to acquire more properties for his family, bought a large estate called Gallenstein (in Slovene: Podpeč pod Skalo (pri Gabrovki) despite not having enough funds for its continued upkeep (Preinfalk 2013, 85–86; Smole 1982, 360). Because of this, he apparently reduced the general living expenses by eliminating almost all luxuries from his family's life, such as firing most of the servants and moving to a smaller apartment, giving away their horses and carriages etc., just so he could take care of this large property.¹⁸ The presumed connection here could be that among those luxuries that were given away could have been pieces of porcelain. The timespan described above includes the time in which “Louise von Lehman” (possibly Alojzija von Lehmann) gifted two pieces of porcelain to the museum.¹⁹

From the description, we can assume that this record describes a rather small, colourfully decorated cup with a small saucer. However, no bright and colourful cups with saucers have yet been identified within the Ceramics Collection at the National Museum of Slovenia. Therefore, we do not know whether the pieces have been lost during the earthquakes in 1895 and 1897 or if they merely remain unidentified in the museum's storage. The label “Japanese porcelain” must also be regarded with caution, as we know that owners of porcelain pieces at the time mainly concerned themselves with the fact that the pieces were indeed of East Asian origin and much less with the specific country they came from.

17 In German: “Frau Louise Edle von Lehman, ein sehr niedliches, bunt bemaltes, achteckigtes Schälchen sammt Untersaß, von Japanischem Porcellain.”

18 Even his last dying wish was for it not to be sold after his passing, as he supposedly begged his wife Alojzija on his deathbed to keep it (Preinfalk 2013, 86). After his death, his wife and three children were made owners of the property and kept it for a while; however, it was sold in 1844 (Smole 1982, 361).

19 It is unclear why a family in need of money would choose to donate valuable porcelain to the museum instead of selling it to improve their financial situation.

Although East Asian origins, whether Chinese or Japanese, were, at the time, considered important enough to be emphasised, the assumed origins of the porcelain pieces recorded were often inaccurate. Seemingly, the only fact that was important enough for the owners was that the porcelain was from East Asia. By extension, we can conclude that, despite the availability of porcelain in Europe and, more specifically, in Carniola, porcelain still, to some extent, retained its characteristic of a curiosity and a hard-to-obtain luxury commodity representing the owners' societal status and material standing well into the 19th century.

The third recorded donor is a woman named only as "Baroness Lazarini", who donated a porcelain cup and saucer set to what is today the Ceramics Collection of the National Museum of Slovenia in 1833. In the fifth issue of the newspaper *Illyrisches Blatt*, which was published at the beginning of February 1833, the gift is recorded as number 44 in the section of the museum's new acquisitions:

44.) Lady Baroness Lazarini, one Japanese porcelain coffee cup.²⁰ (Hoch-enwart 1833c, 20)

During research on the collection and identifying individual pieces of East Asian ceramics, the pieces mentioned in the above record were also positively identified as the ones Lazarini donated to the Regional Museum of Carniola. Although only a coffee cup is mentioned in the *Illyrisches Blatt* record, a smaller plate also belongs with it. This is also confirmed by a later entry in the old inventory book of the National Museum of Slovenia, where both objects are entered as "painted cup with saucer" (*Schale bemalt mit Tasse*). This is the only object recorded as a gift from the Baroness (Mateja Kos, email correspondence with author, autumn 2019).

The small glazed porcelain cup has no handle and is decorated with colourful overglaze enamels that cover its entire outside surface, as well as in the small details painted on the inside. It is decorated with dark pink peony blossoms and green foliage, and the inside rim is painted with a thin band of a light pink geometric diaper pattern. The cup has a small chip on the rim. The foot is not decorated. The round porcelain saucer is decorated in a similar fashion with the exception of the central part of the upper surface, which is decorated with peony blossoms, pink-yellow chrysanthemums, a small butterfly and blue rock, on which two birds, identified as a pair of pheasants, are sitting. The saucer's underside is not decorated and the foot is glazed and unmarked. The characteristic motif and decoration style, including the range of different shades of pink, yellow and green, with the opaque overglaze white enamel, tell us that these are

20 In German: "44.) Frau Baroninn Lazarini, eine Kaffehschale von japanischen Porzellain."

typical examples of *famille rose* Chinese export porcelain from the beginning of the 18th century (fig. 2) (Berdajs 2022).



Figure 2. Cup and saucer with a pheasant and peony motif. Glazed porcelain decorated with colourful overglaze enamels. China. Qing dynasty. 18th century. Gift of Baroness Lazarini, 1833. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 16023 and N 749, National Museum of Slovenia)

However, as a bequestor, Mathilda Baroness von Lazarini was not recorded with her full personal name, only with her noble rank and her husband's surname, Lazarini—both pieces of information necessary to show her high social status. The question of her identity and full name was only resolved by surveying the Lazarini family tree and data obtained via recorded museum acquisitions. The time-frame in which the two pieces of porcelain were donated to the museum can be limited to the end of January and the beginning of February in 1833. At that time, the title of Baroness Lazarini was held by Mathilda Baroness von Lazarini (Lazarini 2013, 216), born Mathilda Grafinn von Stürgkh (ibid., 247). She was the second wife of a prominent member of the family, named Franz Xaver Ignaz Anton Freiherr von Lazarini (1765–1832). Franz met the young Mathilda, Countess von Stürgkh, during a visit to her father, a Styrian nobleman. Soon, a marriage contract was drawn up in which it is written that the father Karl Graf von Stürgkh gave the bride (his daughter) “a capital of 10,000 gulden” (ibid., 244). As only this

specific amount of currency is mentioned, we can assume that this did not include any form of physical property (which could have included porcelain). In 1814, Franz and Mathilda were married at the Graz Cathedral. Despite their 29-year age difference (Mathilda was 20 at the time of the wedding and her husband was 49), according to Franc (or Franci) Lazarini's²¹ later writings, their marriage was happy (*ibid.*, 244). After 18 years of marriage, Franz died of tuberculosis in April 1832 at the age of 67 (*ibid.*, 246). In his last will, written two months before his death, under the sixth point, his legacy to his wife Mathilda is described:

To my beloved wife Mathilda Fr. von Lazarini, born Gr. von Stürgkh, [...] From the furnishings [and/or interior equipment], she can take anything she wishes to the amount of 400 gulden.²² (*ibid.*, 212–213)

The porcelain plate and cup that she donated to the museum could thus have been part of the family legacy that she received after her husband's death under the clause in his will dictating the possessions she could take or choose. The porcelain could have also been bought with the dowry money received under the marriage contract or with another amount left to her by her late husband.

The last female donor of East Asian porcelain noted in the 1833 issues of *Illyrisches Blatt* is Josepha Sorre (or Sore) von Haasberg (active in the early 19th century), also known as Jožefa Zore in Slovene documentation. Through records of museum acquisitions, where she is called "Frau Josepha Sorre" (Hochenwart 1833d, 123), "Frau Sorre von Haasberg" (Hochenwart 1833e, 156), or just "Frau Sorre" (Hochenwart 1833f, 143), with her position being described as "wife of a lease-holder in Haasberg",²³ she is recorded multiple times in 1833 as having donated objects to the museum, including at least five pieces²⁴ of Chinese porcelain (Mateja Kos, email correspondence with author, August 20, 2020). Her donation

21 Franc Lazarini is a descendant of the Lazarini family who published a monograph (entitled *Zgodovina rodbine Lazarini: kronika, dokumenti, genealogija, komentarji, zgodbe*) on the whole family's genealogy in 2013.

22 Published in Slovene: "Svoji ljubljeni soprogi Mathildi Fr. v. Lazarini, rojeni Gr. v. Stürgkh, [...] Od opreme lahko po lastni želji vzame kar koli v višini 400 goldinarjev."

23 Haasberg Castle (in Slovene: Planina (pri Rakeku) or Hošperk) was, at the time, under the ownership of the Coronini–Cronberg family, or more accurately bought by Count Mihael Coronini von Cronberg (1793–1876) and given to his wife Sophie (or Zofija) Coronini von Cronberg (née Fagan) (1792–1857) in 1824. His wife sold the property in 1846 (Smole 1982, 364; Pavlin 2013). It is unclear what if any connection Josepha Sorre had to the Coronini–Cronbergs.

24 According to the objects' old inventory numbers, numbers 1618, 1619, 1622, 1624 and 1636 have been confirmed to have been gifted by Josepha Sorre (or Sore or Sorre von Haasberg). However, objects with the old inventory numbers 1620 and 162 are very similar in style and dating, so the author feels it could be possible that these too came from the same owner.

of porcelains “decorated in Japanese style” (Hochenwart 1833g, 156) was recorded in no. 38 of that same year’s *Illyrisches Blatt*.

The pieces confirmed to have been donated by Josepha Sorre are all porcelains of Chinese origin decorated with thickly applied opaque coloured enamels. The first piece from the assortment is a vase in the *meiping* 每瓶 shape, decorated with coloured overglaze enamels (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Vase with a dragon motif. Glazed porcelain decorated with overglaze enamels. China. Qing dynasty. Late 18th or early 19th century. Gift of Josepha Sorre von Haasberg. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 15155, National Museum of Slovenia)

The vase’s body is painted with a foliage and floral pattern resembling filigree with two large cartouches on each side. Inside each of these spaces, we see a motif of a long winding Chinese dragon in green with a bright pink head. The vase’s short neck is decorated with small red flowers. A very similar piece was also gifted by Josepha Sorre in the same batch of porcelains (fig. 4). The vase has a very similar decoration scheme to the above piece. However, the main cartouches with the motif of a green dragon are encompassed in a pink background with a filigree pattern and colourful chrysanthemum blossoms.



Figure 4. Vase with a dragon motif. Glazed porcelain decorated with overglaze enamels. China. Qing dynasty. Late 18th or early 19th century. Gift of Josepha Sorre von Haasberg. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 15153, National Museum of Slovenia)

The next vase identified from the group is a small cylindrical porcelain vase with a flared mouth (fig. 5). It is decorated rather simply with motifs of garden stones in underglaze blue with blossoming peonies painted in red and green overglaze enamel all around the object.



Figure 5. Vase with a flower motif. Glazed porcelain decorated with underglaze blue and overglaze enamels. China. Qing dynasty. Late 18th or early 19th century. Gift of Josepha Sorre von Haasberg. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 15156, National Museum of Slovenia)

The next object confirmed from Sorre's donation is a lidded dose decorated with colourful overglaze enamels and added gilding in the recognisable *famille rose* style (fig. 6). The lower part of the dose shows people in their living quarters and various flowers, plants, birds and butterflies. Among the flowers, we can recognise the peony, which represents spring and symbolises wealth and honour in connection with a high social position. The cover is painted on the top with the motif of human figures, as well as an edge with the same stylised floral pattern as the lower part of the object. This type of decoration was especially popular throughout Europe in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century (ca. 1860–1910).



Figure 6. Lidded dose. Glazed porcelain decorated with overglaze enamels. China. Qing dynasty. Late 18th or early 19th century. Gift of Josepha Sorre von Haasberg. (Source: Ceramics Collection, N 15159, National Museum of Slovenia)

In the old inventory book of the National Museum of Slovenia, these pieces were recorded as “Japanese vessel” (*Japanische Gefässe*); however, it is quite clear from the shape, motifs and decorating technique that the objects are all of Chinese origin. Based mainly on the technique of decoration, it was dated to most probably the very late 18th- or early 19th century.²⁵ There are at least three more Chinese porcelain vases that could be part of this group of objects donated by Josepha Sorre in 1833. However, with the currently available data, we cannot confirm their complete provenance and they were therefore not included as part of this research.

25 This object was part of the workshop entitled “Chinese ceramics” led by Dr Stacey Pierson and Dr Sabrina Rastelli, organised as part of the symposium programme *From Centre to Periphery: Collecting Chinese Objects in Comparative Perspective* (19–22 September 2019). During the workshop, the object’s approximate dating was confirmed.

Conclusion

Old newspaper publications are valuable resources for researching the acquisitions of museum objects because they provide a unique historical perspective on the provenance and context of these specific objects. By examining the “Landes-Museum aus Laibach” columns from the 19th century, when the objects were acquired, we can gain certain, but often still limited, insights into the possible circumstances of these acquisitions, but most importantly, an insight into the identities of the specific donors.

When conducting research on a well-known figure or someone who is distinguished in their field, an obvious first step is to review any available memoirs, biographies or published correspondence (Stolberg and Lehmann 2020, 65). When researching women, even members of prominent noble families, we often find that there tends to be less biographical information on them than on men. In these cases, the best approach is to identify surname changes to find further information about their lives and identities (ibid., 65).

When researching these donors to the museum, the most helpful thing proved to be a reverse research of the whole family's genealogies and that of its specific female members in the time-frame when the donations to the museum took place. The main information we can use in researching women donors to Slovene museum collections is, therefore, obtained from old publications and histories of estate owners. These approaches also undoubtedly reflect the very specific position of women in a certain geographical space, as well as the period they lived in, which could surely benefit from further research.

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