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# China and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Overture to a Study of the Vase in Eighteenth-Century France

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One of the more remarkable aspects of eighteenth-century European art is the proliferation of vases, both as physical objects and design ideas. From the illustrated volume dedicated to them in Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach's historical survey of architecture, *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur* (1721), to the near ubiquitous presence of porcelain and hardstone vessels in elite eighteenth-century collections, to their mobilization by caricaturists in the latter half of the century, vases were ever present referents in eighteenth-century European culture. Indeed, it has been claimed that the eighteenth century was seized by a veritable "vasomanie."<sup>[1]</sup>

The eighteenth-century vase was, by definition, multilayered. As a physical object, its forms and materials simultaneously connoted antiquity, Asia, and the princely courts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.<sup>[2]</sup> A rock crystal or porcelain vase could be functional, that is, intended for use, but more often, especially when mounted in heavy gilt bronze, it was not. When executed on paper, the vase allowed for inventiveness and experimentation that other art forms did not. Freed from the demands of use, overt narrative or the constraints of architectural commissions, vase design offered a "multilayered template" for the display by artists and architects of artistic ability, one that was particularly suited to circulation in prints.<sup>[3]</sup> At the same time, the increasing attention to vases over the course of the century by designers, antiquarians and collectors alike, resonated with the developing fascination for ancient history and for Etruscan and Greco-Roman antiquity in particular. For Fischer von Erlach, vases were a means to organize and illustrate universal histories.<sup>[4]</sup> Scholars later in the century elevated the figural decoration of painted Greek vases over their functional use, thereby consolidating an understanding of them as valuable works of art that is still with us today.<sup>[5]</sup>

Despite some prominent exceptions, most eighteenth-century French collectors did not collect Greek vessels. Instead they amassed vases in hardstone, marble or porcelain. Many were of contemporary design, though not infrequently made of antique materials, and most did not feature figurative representations.<sup>[6]</sup> In contrast to painted Greek vases, these kinds of objects have not found their way into the art historical canon. Devoid of the pictorial narratives that raised Greek vases to the level of painting, stone and ceramic vessels of the sort I will discuss have generally been understood as less capable of embodying or conveying complex cultural meanings.<sup>[7]</sup> The relative lack of eighteenth-century critical discourse on vases, in comparison with the considerable period commentary on painting and sculpture, has been interpreted as evidence of their role as decorative accessories. And yet, the sheer numbers of such vases in eighteenth-century collections, and the considerable expense and effort expended on their acquisition and display, suggest more multivalent significations.

This paper insists on the multilayered meanings of vase forms and of the materials from which they were made. Focusing on selected vases and their display in eighteenth-century French collections, it takes up Glenn Adamson's injunction to design historians to move beyond the elitism embedded in the term "decorative arts," and to take decorative art seriously as a framework through which to engage with history.<sup>[8]</sup> It also builds upon recent art historical scholarship on ornament and decoration that insists on the substance rather than the superficiality of an object's surface effects.<sup>[9]</sup> At the same time, vases were not encountered in isolation in eighteenth-century collections. They accrued meanings by their association with other objects and within the specific spaces in which they were placed. Layering the visual pleasures and antiquarian references of eighteenth-century vases, in the following pages I speculate on the ways in which their materials and display registered imaginative negotiations of

ancient history.

More particularly, I am interested in the place of China, as figured by its porcelains, within eighteenth-century French reengagements with classical antiquity. “China” signified variously in eighteenth-century Europe. It was a vast, multi-ethnic empire and an unquestionably civilized polity with priority in the invention of the compass, paper, printing, and porcelain, and it had a long and venerable history that both unsettled biblical narratives and shadowed Europe’s constructs of its Greco-Roman heritage.<sup>[10]</sup> While *philosophes* and various European East India Company officials increasingly denounced China’s great antiquity as the source of its presumed immobility and stasis, for others, China’s long history could not be so easily dismissed. As Greg Thomas has argued, the eighteenth-century Qing court was a site of fantastical projection and imaginative identification for French elites, an identification promoted by luxury imports such as porcelain and lacquer and materialized in chinoiserie.<sup>[11]</sup> This article extends Thomas’s arguments by proposing that China’s antiquity served as a similar point of imaginative identification in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and that vases served as material sites in which China’s antiquity was accommodated to that of the Greco-Roman world. It does so first by focusing on an exceptional Sèvres porcelain vase produced in the mid 1770s, and then by a discussion of selected display contexts for Chinese porcelains in the second half of the eighteenth century. Episodic rather than exhaustive, this study is a preliminary sketch of a broader inquiry into the meanings of the vase in eighteenth-century France.



Fig. 1. Vase Japon, Sèvres porcelain manufactory, 1774, The Frick Collection, New York, Purchase in Honor of Anne L. Poulet, 2011 (2011.9.01) © The Frick Collection.

## A Chinese Vase at Sèvres

The capacity of eighteenth-century vase design to embody historical and cross-cultural reflection is suggested by the *vase Japon* produced in limited numbers by the Sèvres porcelain manufactory beginning in 1773 or 1774 (**Fig. 1**).<sup>[12]</sup> Executed in hard paste porcelain using kaolin from deposits discovered in France near Limoges in 1768, the *vase Japon* refers not to a Japanese ceramic, as its name suggests, but instead emulates an ancient Chinese bronze You form (**Fig. 2**).<sup>[13]</sup> A *vase Chinois* was already in production at Sèvres, and the designation *Japon* was presumably chosen to signal the vessel's Asian derivation while also differentiating it from the earlier model.<sup>[14]</sup> The fabrication of the *vase Japon* was almost certainly instigated by the French statesman, Henri-Léonard Bertin (1720-1792), whose ministerial brief included oversight of the Sèvres factory, and who was also the owner of the illustrated Chinese book that provided the woodcut model for the vase. This was the *Qin ding xi qing gu jian* (Imperially Ordained Mirror of Antiquities Prepared in the Xiqing Hall), an illustrated four-volume, 40-fascicle printed catalog, compiled from 1749-1755, of the imperial collection of ancient bronze vessels.<sup>[15]</sup> The catalog had been sent to Bertin from Beijing in the late 1760s, and he was possibly the only eighteenth-century European to own a copy of it. Through a chance encounter in 1764 with two Chinese priests, Gao Ren (1732-after 1795?) and Yang Zhide (1733-1798?), better known by their Christian names Aloys (Louis) Ko and Étienne Yang, Bertin had secured a direct, if

backdoor, conduit to the Qing court in Beijing, thereby circumventing the Qing restriction of foreign trade to the port of Canton. The two priests met the minister when they sought passage back to China during the brief period that he was in charge of the French India Company. Bertin immediately recruited them to serve as intermediaries between himself and the Qing empire. Through the community of French Jesuits serving the Qianlong emperor in Beijing, to whom Ko and Yang returned, Bertin received remarkable objects including jades, imperial porcelains, paintings documenting Chinese antiquities, and books printed at the imperial presses, such as the *Xi qing gu jian*. Bertin arranged for equally notable items to be sent to Beijing, including scientific instruments, chinoiserie tapestries produced by the Beauvais factory, and porcelains from Sèvres.[16] In 1785, he dispatched a set of two vases *Japon* to be presented to the Qing court.

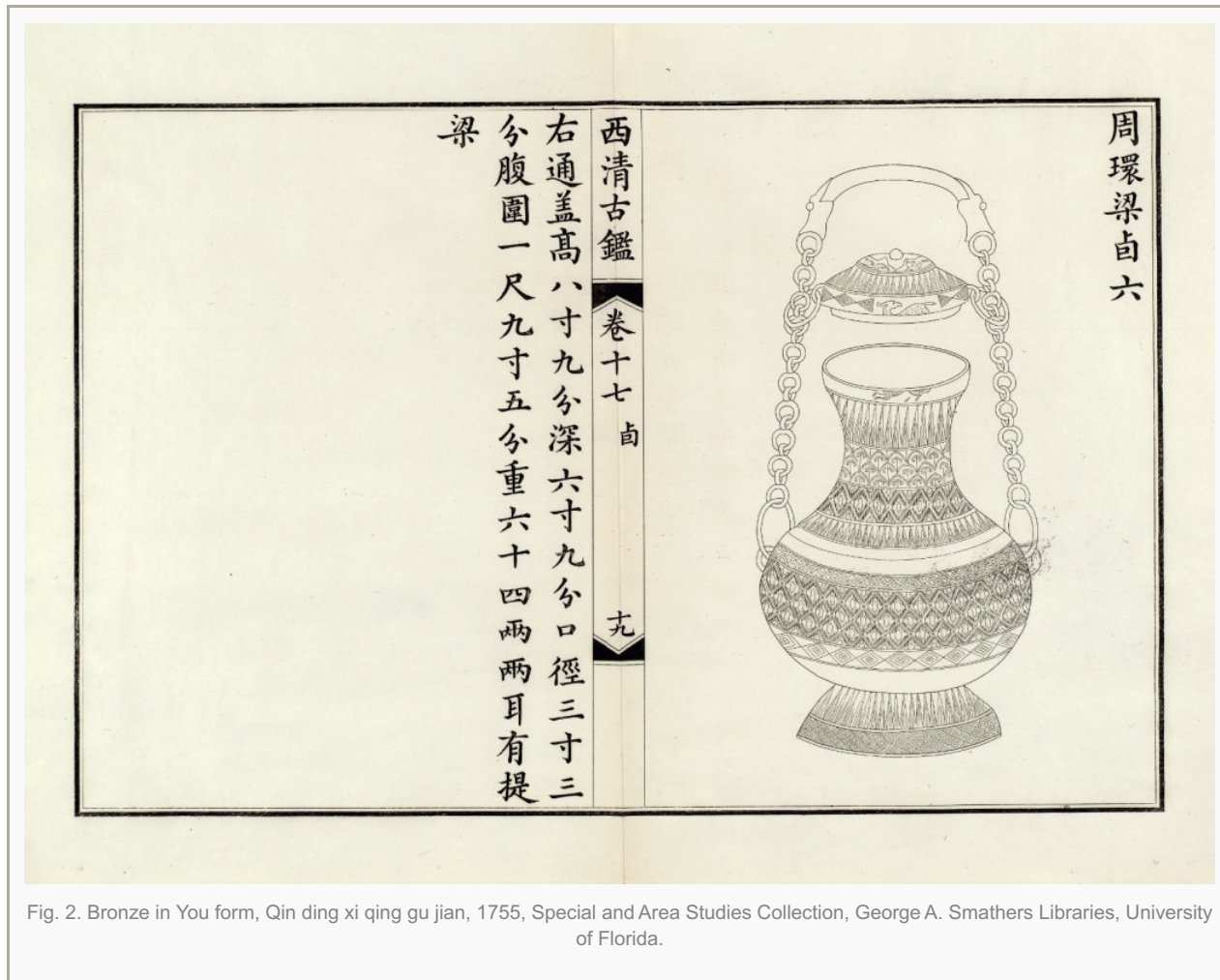


Fig. 2. Bronze in You form, *Qin ding xi qing gu jian*, 1755, Special and Area Studies Collection, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida.

For Bertin, a man with a keen personal and professional interest in Chinese history, the *Xi qing gu jian* provided striking visual evidence of the complementarity of Chinese and Greco-Roman antiquities. In letters acknowledging his receipt of the “magnificent” and “invaluable” book, Bertin repeatedly compared the forms of the ancient bronze vessels to those of Greco-Roman vases.[17] As he wrote to Ko and Yang in 1771, the woodcuts in the book depicted ancient objects surprisingly similar in form to the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquities reproduced in contemporary European antiquarian texts: “I was surprised to see almost all of those that the Greeks and the Romans dedicated to their sacrifices. The beauty of the forms is identical. Some closely resemble the Egyptian monuments that one finds in the books of antiquities by Montfaucon, Kircher, La Chausse, Caylus, etc.”[18] In 1774, Bertin referred to the book’s illustrations again, noting that in them one encountered “the most beautiful forms of vases, vases that the Greeks and Romans would not have disdained to place in their collections.” He regretted, however, that he had no one to explain the uses of the vessels to him, or to translate the characters accompanying each bronze, which he interpreted as articulating the “rules” regulating their design. In the absence of such knowledge, Bertin resorted to technical experimentation, instructing the ceramicists at Sèvres to engage with the forms and ornamentation of the bronzes by translating them into porcelain. He in turn ensured the resulting



ceramics were noticed by French courtiers: “I had two of these vases produced at the king’s porcelain manufactory this year; they were very much appreciated at court, and the king gave them to one of his grandsons.”[19]

In 1785, five years after he had left office, Bertin ordered two more *vases Japon* from Sèvres, intending to send them to the Qing court. According to Bertin’s letter to Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (1718-1793), the former Jesuit in Beijing to whom he shipped the vases, when Louis XVI was informed that the factory could not produce them in time for the departure of ships to China, the king gave Bertin his own set, then at the Château de Compiègne.[20] While the veracity of this account is open to debate — the Sèvres sales records show that Bertin paid for two *vases Japon* on October 17, 1785, two months before he penned his letter to Amiot — the anecdote indicates Bertin wanted the porcelains to be given to the emperor.[21] Louis XVI’s gesture made the vases “worthy of the consideration of a sovereign.”[22] Amiot understood Bertin’s implication. When the porcelains finally arrived in Beijing in 1788, he declared, “the two beautiful vases, *forme du Japon*, are truly valuable. I have already put them aside to be presented to the emperor during his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.”[23] Whether the vases were actually offered to the Qianlong emperor in 1790, the year of the festivities, is unknown. How they were decorated is equally unclear. Amiot’s account of their reception in Beijing suggests, however, that not only the form but also the glaze colors were meant to emulate metal. He reported, presumably somewhat exaggeratedly, that “the vases imitating the antique that your packing list says are made of porcelain were appreciated by the same prince [a prince of the court to whom Amiot showed the vases], except it was only after I gave my word that he would believe they were made of porcelain and were not actual antiquities in copper or some other metal.”[24]

With this choice of offering, Bertin no doubt sought to prove French prowess in hard paste porcelain production, a hard won achievement he was keen to demonstrate to the Qing court.[25] At the same time, the fabrication of the vases and their shipment to Beijing also conveyed French appreciation of Chinese antiquities and French awareness of the repetition and medial transfer from antique bronze to porcelain in Chinese art. In addition to objects and printed books, the Beijing Jesuits sent Bertin hundreds of paintings documenting Chinese objects, including some identified as depicting ancient bronze forms replicated in porcelain. According to extant packing lists, he also received at least one example of a Qing porcelain emulating an ancient Chinese gold vase.[26] Sending the two *vases Japon* thus communicated cultural compatibility; in that sense the vases materialized Bertin’s stated view of China and France as civilizational equals. As he wrote to Ko and Yang before their return to China, he presumed a “conformity of customs, genius and character ... between the Chinese and the French, the two nations that can be considered the most polite and the most sociable of the universe.”[27]

### **Antiquity on Display: Hardstone Vases and Chinese Porcelain**

The history of the *vase Japon* is an exceptional one, but it exemplifies how cultural differences and compatibilities were materially negotiated through the design of objects. It further points to an interrelationship between materials, form, and historical reflection that may help to interpret the display of Asian porcelain in elite French interiors in the second half of the eighteenth century. In addition to conveying the standing of their eighteenth-century owners, Chinese ceramics might also have evoked the splendor of the vases of precious materials, notably myrrhine ware, with which the ancient Romans were reputedly enamored.

The most common way to display non-utilitarian Asian ceramics in eighteenth-century France was to mount them in gilt bronze. Gilt bronze harmonized the rare and unusual porcelains it ornamented with the décor of their interior settings, while simultaneously singling out the porcelains it adorned for special attention.[28] The resulting objects, a combination of expensive Asian porcelain and exquisite French craftsmanship, embodied the magnificence of their owners and were thus put to work in the eighteenth-century semiotics of status and group identity.[29] Mounts could also easily be replaced, and by the 1760s, French collectors increasingly favored classicizing metal surrounds for their Asian ceramics, as they did for other valuable objects worthy of ornamentation. While this shift to the classical in the decorative arts is frequently ascribed to changes in taste, it likely also subtly signaled a transformation in the

understanding of the objects it adorned.



Fig. 3. Chinese porcelain mounted in gilt bronze, porcelain: China, first half of the 18th century; mounts: Paris, c. 1760-65. Musée du Louvre, Paris, OA 5445. © Musée du Louvre, Paris, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Thierry Ollivier/Art Resource, NY.

Two mounted ceramics from the collection of Jean de Jullienne provide a compelling example. In the 1760s, Jullienne (1686-1766), a wealthy textile manufacturer, honorary amateur, and collector, had two imposing turquoise Chinese porcelain jars transformed into potpourri containers (**Fig. 3**).<sup>[30]</sup> Measuring over half a meter in height, the jars are impressive examples of the Chinese potters' mastery of monochrome glaze technology, an aspect of Chinese porcelain production particularly appreciated by eighteenth-century French collectors. Jullienne's vases also featured rather schematic dragons and foliage in relief on their sides and a *magot* at the top described as "laughing and with a big belly" in the catalog of his estate sale published in 1767.<sup>[31]</sup> The jars were framed with ornaments in "the antique taste," ranging from ram's heads to laurel wreaths to the openwork Vitruvian wave scroll of the collars. For some recent commentators, the combination of Chinese beasts and laughing, pot-bellied figures with emphatically classicizing gilt bronze ornamentation is somewhat incongruous.<sup>[32]</sup> Perhaps the combination is less surprising, however, if one relates the antique references less to the style of the figurative elements of the vases and more to eighteenth-century understandings of their material and the civilization from which they came.

Such objects were placed within richly suggestive ensembles of materials. Jullienne displayed his mounted porcelain jars in his gallery, where they were exhibited alongside paintings, numerous other Asian ceramics and other valuable objects including marbles, bronze statues, or hardstone vases.<sup>[33]</sup> Just how visually arresting the resulting juxtaposition of colors and patterns could be is conveyed by a set of little known watercolors depicting select mounted porcelain and stone vases from the prodigious collection of the financier Pierre Louis Paul Randon de Boisset (1708-1776).<sup>[34]</sup> Interleaved into a copy of the catalog of his estate sale, published in 1777 and now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the watercolors also show the marble columns on which both kinds of vessels were frequently displayed in late eighteenth-century interiors. The image depicting lot 507, for example,

represents one of a set of two highly-colored, large Chinese porcelains adorned with classicizing square handles and satyr's heads in gilt bronze (**Fig. 4**). Both porcelains were set on columns of black and white “grand antique” marble, whose capitals and bases were also ornamented with gilt bronze.[35] Such a presentation indicates that Asian ceramics were assimilated to Greco-Roman antiquity not only through their mounts but also through their frequent display on marble columns or plinths that actually were antique or evoked classical antiquity through their materials and forms.



According to Randon de Boisset's post-mortem inventory, taken in 1776, the porcelains on their columns were located in the salon on the first floor of his *hôtel* on the rue Neuve des Capucines near the place Vendôme.[36] Measuring a total of 64 Paris *pouces* in height, the two columns and their ceramics must have been imposing presences in the room. Though singled out by their placement on the columns, the porcelains were located in the company of other Asian ceramics, granite vases as well as porphyry vessels and marble and porphyry topped tables. Among the other objects in the room was a pair of vases in *verde antico* marble that were also depicted in one of the National Gallery watercolors (**Figs 5 and 6**).[37] These images and objects provide a rare glimpse of the sensuous ensembles of eighteenth-century elite reception spaces. In a setting like Randon de Boisset's salon, brilliantly glazed Chinese porcelain, variegated columns, and dark marble vases mutually conferred their visual luster on each other, offering, in conjunction with the paintings and furniture, “le coup d’oeil le plus satisfaisant.”[38] The effect was multiplied in Randon de Boisset's top-lit picture gallery with its multiple columns and stone and porcelain vases (**Fig. 7**).





Fig. 6. Pair of verde antico marble vases mounted in gilt bronze, c. 1770. Formerly in the Randon de Boisset collection. Private collection.

The proximity, in such a collection, of Asian porcelains to vessels and columns in purple-red porphyry and other rare materials that came from or connoted the ancient world lent the patina of antiquity to the ceramics.<sup>[39]</sup> By the time of Randon de Boisset's sale in 1777, the numbers of marble vases in the most notable French collections had increased dramatically, their growing presence paralleling the renewed intensity of interest in the ancient world. In 1748, the sale of Louis-Augustin Angran de Fonspertius's extensive collection of *objets d'art* included no hardstone vases. In 1756 the duc de Tallard owned two. Jean de Jullienne's estate sale in 1767 contained thirteen. Nearly ten years later, in 1776, 32 were inventoried in the collection of the financier Augustin de Blondel de Gagny; in the catalog of his estate sale they were organized into seven categories according to material. Randon de Boisset owned an impressive 52 stone vases, classified by material into 13 groups.<sup>[40]</sup>



Fig. 7. Gabriel de Saint Aubin, *The Randon de Boisset Gallery*, 1777. Musée des arts décoratifs, Lyon, Hennezel 5272.a © Lyon, MTMAD – Sylvain Pretto.

This attention to classification suggests the degree to which the substances from which the objects were made mattered. The consideration paid in some entries to their antique origins suggests they were valued because they offered material links to the ancient world. Tellingly, the first illustration of an object to appear in an eighteenth-century French auction catalog was a “magnificent” porphyry vase on a granite column with its base and capital in “griotte d’Italie,” included in the catalog of the duc de Tallard’s estate in 1756. The accompanying description highlighted the rarity of the column, noting the current impossibility of importing such “famous remains of the grandeur of the ancient Romans” as well as the considerable expense the ancient Romans went to in order to import the granite from a now inaccessible quarry in Egypt. The entry additionally emphasized the difficulty of working materials as hard as granite and porphyry.<sup>[41]</sup> Just how desirable it was to have such objects is illustrated by the stone-cutting workshops established in 1771 or 1772 at the Hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs in Versailles by the court noble, collector, and first gentleman of the bedchamber, Louis Marie Augustin, duc d’Aumont (1709-1782).<sup>[42]</sup> It was likely here that many of the duc d’Aumont’s numerous columns or vases carved from extant ancient porphyry and marble pillars were crafted.

The duc d’Aumont did not collect paintings. Instead he amassed a remarkable collection of marble and porphyry objects and of Asian porcelains, almost all mounted in elegant gilt bronze settings (**Fig. 8**).<sup>[43]</sup> The combined display of these kinds of objects in his collection could be said to have evoked an eighteenth-century image of antiquity in which opulent materials, notably in the form of vases, were highly valued. Particularly noteworthy among the vessels discussed by such ancient writers as Pliny the Elder were those made of “myrrhine,” a truly precious and fragile substance from the East more valued by ancient patricians than silver and gold.<sup>[44]</sup> But what myrrhine (or



murrhine) actually was remained the subject of debate well into the twentieth century. According to Pliny, it had to be mined, and it appeared that heat was essential to its final form. Today the material is identified with fluorspar, but for the eighteenth-century French scholar, Pierre-Jean Mariette, reasoning on the basis of Pliny's descriptions of its material properties and Asian origins, myrrhine could only be Chinese porcelain.[45] The prominent antiquarian, the comte de Caylus, agreed. In a long article published in 1756, Caylus correlated a close reading of the various vessels described in book 11 of Athenaeus's *The Deipnosophists* (Banquet of the Learned, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE) with the evidence of the materials and workmanship of extant ancient vases. Caylus made a strong claim for the esteem in which the ancients held vases, highlighting their appreciation of materials and of the skill required to work them. He also concurred with Mariette's identification of myrrhine ware as porcelain.[46] Though it has little resonance for historians today, the widespread familiarity with Pliny's descriptions of myrrhine and the longevity of the substance's associations are indicated by a prizewinning essay published in 1804. There the latest Sèvres porcelains are extolled as having finally rivaled "les vases Myrrhyne." [47]

Asian porcelain readily lent itself to such speculation. It was made from a material whose secrets had eluded Europeans for centuries, but whose essential components were mined from the earth and hardened into their definitive form by heat. The brilliant colors of Asian glazes echoed the highly colored myrrhine wares described by Pliny, as Mariette pointed out. Asian porcelains were also particularly difficult to date. As the dealer J.B.P Lebrun pointed out in 1781, "Unlike ancient medals, [Asian] porcelains do not provide any knowledge of distant times. Old porcelain, though it may be ornamented with some Chinese characters, marks no point of history." [48] It was this lack of knowledge that Bertin sought to remedy through his contacts in Beijing, but it was this same uncertainty that facilitated the assimilation, through display, of Chinese ceramics into, rather than against, a vision of an opulent Greco-Roman antiquity. Porcelain was, after all, the invention of a civilization of great antiquity, one whose founding predated the biblical flood. It was also, according to eighteenth-century French antiquarians, a material highly prized by the ancients. Elite collectors who displayed Asian ceramics on antique columns or alongside vases made from or referring to ancient marbles could thus be said to have staged their affinities simultaneously with their Greco-Roman past and with China, the only other civilization then known to rival Europe in the duration of its history, technical achievements, and refinement.

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Fig. 8. Pierre-Adrien Pâris, Watercolor depicting lot 163, inserted in P. F. Julliot and A. J. Paillet, *Catalogue ... cabinet de feu M. le duc d'Aumont* (Paris, 1782). Bibliothèque national de France, Rés V 2845.

- [1] Werner Oechslin and Oskar Bätschmann, *Die Vase* (Zurich: Kunstgewerbe Museum, 1982), 129; Heather Jane McCormick et al., *Vasemania: Neoclassical Form and Ornament in Europe: Selections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). On the vase in eighteenth-century caricature, see Perrin Stein, "Vases and Satire," in *The Saint-Aubin Livre des caricatures: Drawing Satire in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, ed. Colin Jones, Juliet Carey and Emily Richardson (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012), 301-21.
- [2] On vases, especially hardstone vases, within longer traditions of European princely collecting, see Wolfram Koeppe and Annamaria Giusti, *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), and Daniel Alcouffe, *Les gemmes de la couronne* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), each with extensive further bibliography. On the longer history of early modern European engagements with the vase as a form and as a concept see Oechslin and Bätschmann's important study, *Die Vase*.
- [3] Hans Ottomeyer, "The Metamorphosis of the Neoclassical Vase," in McCormick et al., *Vasemania*, 15.
- [4] While Fischer von Erlach devoted the first four books of *Entwurf einer Historischen Architectur* (A Plan of Historical Architecture) (Vienna: n.p., 1721) to world architecture, the last featured a chronologically organized survey of "Divers vases antiques, aegyptiens, grecs, romains, & modernes: avec quelques uns de l'invention de l'auteur."
- [5] In 1764, the antiquarian Johann Joachim Winckelmann famously compared Greek vase painting to drawings by Raphael: "the drawing on most vessels is such that the figures might deservedly find a place in a drawing by Raphael . . . A collection of them is a treasure trove of drawing." Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), trans. Harry Francis Malgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 177-178. On the historiography of the Greek vase, see, among others, Alain Schnapp, "Die griechische Vasen. Vom Sammeln der Kunst zur Kunst des Sammelns," in *Sammeln und Erforschen: Griechische Vasen in neuzeitlichen Sammlungen*, ed. Stefan Schmidt and Matthias Steinhart (Munich: Beck, 2014), 161-72, esp. 162-166; *Le vase grec et ses destins*, ed. Pierre Rouillard and Annie Verbanck-Piérard (Munich: Biering & Brinkmann, 2003); Vinnie Nørskov, *Greek Vases in New Contexts: The Collecting and Trading of Greek Vases: An Aspect of the Modern Reception of Antiquity* (Aarhus and Oakville, CT: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 11-54, and the rich literature on the eighteenth-century collector William Hamilton including Michael Vickers, "Hamilton, Geology, Stone Vases and Taste," *Journal of the History of Collections* 9, no. 2 (1997): 263-74, esp. 268-71, and the exhibition catalog by Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and His Collection* (London: British Museum, 1996).
- [6] In France, antiquarians such as the comte de Caylus, Pierre-Jean Mariette, and later Dominique Vivant Denon actively collected painted Greek vases. They were of less interest to the elite collectors discussed here.
- [7] See Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan's excellent introduction to their edited volume, *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 1-17, esp. 3-5 and 9-12. Exceptions to this tendency include Juliet Carey, "Aiming High: Porcelain, Sèvres and the Grand Vase," *Art History* 31, no. 5 (2008): 721-753; Mimi Hellman, "The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior," in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Pasts*, ed. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York: Routledge, 2007): 129-153; and the essays in Cavanaugh and Yonan. The cultural meanings of hardstone vases in the eighteenth century have received less attention, but see Philippe Malgouyres, *Porphyre – la pierre pourpre des Ptolémées aux Bonaparte* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003), and Vickers, "Hamilton, Geology."
- [8] Glenn Adamson, "Design History and the Decorative Arts," in *Cultural Histories of the Material World*, ed. Peter N. Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 33-38, here 36-37.
- [9] For recent, provocative studies of surface see Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010); *Surface Tensions: Surface, Finish and the*



*Meaning of Objects*, ed. Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), and Stacey Sloboda, "Surface Contact: Decoration in the Chinese Taste," in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ding Ning (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 248-263.

[10] Drawing on Chinese sources, the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary Martino Martini had dated the beginning of Chinese history to 2952 BCE, a date well before the biblical flood in 2349 BCE. China's long history thus posed a considerable challenge to the biblical view of Noah as the father of all mankind. D. E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2013), 103-104.

[11] Greg M. Thomas, "Yuanming Yuan/Versailles: Intercultural Interactions between Chinese and European Palace Cultures," *Art History* 32 (2009): 115-143; Katie Scott, "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de La Muette," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 189-247.

[12] To my knowledge, only three examples are extant: one in The Frick Collection, New York (illustrated here) and a set of two in the collection of the Louvre Abu Dhabi. On the version in The Frick Collection, see Charlotte Vignon, *The Frick Collection: Decorative Arts Handbook* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2015), 124.

[13] The vase *Japon* was one of a small number of objects inspired by Chinese models produced at Sèvres from c. 1773. See Selma Schwartz, "In the Chinese Taste," *Apollo* (September 2012): 68-73.

[14] On the vase *Chinois* see Rosalind Savill, *The Wallace Collection Catalogue of Sèvres Porcelain*, 3 vols. (London: The Wallace Collection, 1988), 1: 357-64. The name of the vase *Japon*, however, does highlight some of the fluidity between the categories Japanese and Chinese in eighteenth-century understandings of Asian porcelain. Large numbers of ceramics were classified as "ancien Japon" in eighteenth-century French auction catalogs, but while some were of Japanese origin, many, particularly those categorized as "ancien céladon du Japon," were not. See for example, Sylvia Vríz, "Le duc d'Aumont et les porcelaines d'Extrême-Orient de la collection de M. Jean de Jullienne," *Sèvres: Revue de la Société des amis du Musée national de céramique*, no. 22 (2013): 89-98, here 91-94. On the European reception of Japanese ceramics in this period see John Ayers, Oliver Impey, and J.V.G. Mallet, *Porcelain for Palaces: The Fashion for Japan in Europe, 1650-1750* (London: Oriental Ceramic Society, 1990).

[15] See Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81, from which the translation of the title is taken.

[16] For a recent study of one of the porcelain gifts to Bertin, see Kee Il Choi, "Father Amiot's Cup: A Qing Imperial Porcelain sent to the Court of Louis XV," in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 33-41. On Bertin's dispatch of the tapestries, see Kristel Smentek, "Chinoiserie for the Qing: A French Gift of Tapestries to the Qianlong Emperor," *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 1 (2016): 87-109.

[17] "Ce sont 4 volumes magnifiques qui contiennent les gravures ou impressions des vases chinois de la plus haute antiquité," Henri-Léonard Bertin to Aloys Ko and Étienne Yang, Paris, 18 January 1774, Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, Paris (hereafter cited as BI), Ms. 1522, f. 57r. They are described as "prétieux" in Bertin to Ko and Yang, Versailles, 23 December 1771, BI, Ms. 1521, f. 148r.

[18] "J'ai été surprise d'y voir presque tous ceux que les grecs et les romains avoient consacré a leurs sacrifices, la beauté des formes est la même, on envoie quelques uns qui ressemblent beaucoup aux monumens Égyptiens qu'on trouve dans les Recueils d'antiquités de Montfaucon, Kircher, La Chausse, Caylus & c." Bertin to Ko and Yang, Versailles, 23 December 1771, BI, Ms. 1521, f. 148r.

[19] "[O]n voit les plus belles formes des vases que les grecs et romains ne dédaigneroient pas d'avoir dans leurs recueils ou pour mieux dire qui figuroient bien auprès des leurs; je regrettois dans ma lettre de n'avoir personne pour expliquer les usages auxquels la plupart de ces vases antiques étoient destinées, sur les profils dont les règles paroissent être écrites a côté des desseins [...] J'ai fait exécuter cette année deux de ces vases dans la

manufacture de porcelaine du Roy, ils ont été très goûtés à la cour et le Roy en a fait présent à l'un de ses petits fils.” Bertin to Ko and Yang, Paris, 18 January 1774, BI, Ms. 1522, f. 57r-v.

[20] Bertin, “Observations jointes à la lettre du 21 Xbre 1785,” BI, Ms. 1518, f. 207r.

[21] Archives, Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, registres de ventes, Vy 9, f. 252v. On the other hand, the Sèvres production records show no evidence that any vases *Japon* were produced c. 1785. My thanks to Vincent Bastien for sharing his research on the latter with me.

[22] “Ils sont dignes des regards d’un souverain, car il faut qu’il sache que le Roy qui les avoit a Compiègne ayant appris que je les ferois chercher, et que sa manufacture n’auroit pas le tems de les faire d’icy au depart des vaisseaux, s’est donné la peine dans un voyage qu’il a fait a Compiègne de les faire emballer devant luy et me les a envoyé pour notre correspondant chinois.” Bertin, “Observations jointes à la lettre du 21 Xbre 1785,” BI, Ms. 1518, f. 207r.

[23] “Les deux beaux vases, forme du Japon, sont vraiment précieuses. Je les ay déjà mis à quartier pour être offerts à l’Empereur lors de son ouan-cheou de la 80.e année de son âge.” Jean Joseph Marie Amiot to Bertin, Beijing, 11 November 1788, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris, Department of Manuscripts, Bréquigny 2, f. 219r.

[24] “Ces vases imitant l’antique, que le catalogue des effets envoyés dit être de Porcelaine, n’a pas eû une moindre approbation de la part de ce même Prince; seulement ce n’est que sur ma parole qu’il a bien voulu croire qu’ils sont de Porcelaine et non de véritables antiques de cuivre ou de tout autre métal (Amiot’s emphasis).” Amiot to Bertin, 20 August 1790, BI, Ms. 1517, f. 105r.

[25] See, for example, Bertin to Ko and Yang, Paris, 18 January 1774, BI, Ms. 1522, f. 41r.

[26] In Bertin’s album “Recueil de vases antiques, et pièces tirés des cabinets chinois de l’empereur Kien-Long,” one vessel is identified as a “vase antique en bronze imité en porcelaine” (f. 54). The album was sold at Christie’s New York, 9-10 April 2013, lot. 60. The porcelain emulating an antique gold vase is listed in Henri Bernard[-Maître], “Catalogue des objets envoyés de Chine par les missionnaires de 1765 à 1786,” *Bulletin de l’Université l’Aurore* 9 (1948): 118-206, here 145.

[27] “[Une] conformité de moeurs, de génie et de caractère... entre les Chinois & les François, ces deux nations pouvant être considérées comme les plus policées et les plus sociable de l’univers.” “Instruction pour M. Ko et pour M. Yang,” 16 January 1765, BI, Ms. 1521, f. 71.

[28] Adamson, “Design History,” 34: “Highly ornamented objects were so for a reason—to mark them out as being more important, and better than other objects.” Stacey Pierson has characterized the mounting of Asian porcelains in Europe as an “exceptionalizing process.” See Pierson, *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 36.

[29] Kristel Smentek, *Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* (New York: Frick Collection, 2007), 10-16. On the fabrication of mounted porcelains in eighteenth-century France, see Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996).

[30] On the vases see Jannic Durand et al., *Decorative Furnishings and Objets d’art in the Louvre from Louis XIV to Marie-Antoinette* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2014), 442, and Daniel Alcouffe, *Gilt Bronzes in the Louvre* (Dijon: Faton, 2004), 146. For a fascinating study of Jullienne’s display practices in relation to sensationist philosophy, see Isabelle Tillerot, “Du ‘tact flou et séduisant des couleurs’ chez Jullienne ou l’art de marier tableaux, porcelaines, laques, statuettes, meubles, et autres effets,” in *Corrélations: les objets du décor au siècle des lumières*, ed. Anne Perrin Khelissa (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, 2015), 149-181.

[31] “Terminé par un magot, de même porcelaine, rieur & à gros ventre,” Pierre Remy and C. F. Julliot, *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, desseins & estampes, et autres effets curieux, après le décès de M. de Jullienne* (Paris: Chez Vente, 1767), lot 1424. The mounts were described as in the “goût antique.” The porcelains sold for 3,600 *livres*. Durand et al., *Decorative Furnishings*, 442.

[32] Durand et al., *Decorative Furnishings*, 442.

[33] Tillerot, “Du ‘tact flou’,” 156-159 and the caption to figure XVIII in which she identifies the jars as having been displayed in Jullienne’s gallery.

[34] One of these watercolors was published in Ronald Freyberger, “The Randon de Boisset Sale, 1777: Decorative Arts,” *Apollo* (April 1980): 302.

[35] P. Remy and C. F. Julliot, *Catalogue de tableaux & desseins précieux, figures & vases de marbres & de bronze, porcelaines du premier choix, ouvrages du célèbre Boule & autres effets de conséquence qui composent le Cabinet de feu M. Randon de Boisset* (Paris: De l’Imprimerie de Didot, 1777), pt. 2: 38. The porcelains and their columns were valued at 2000 *livres* in the post-mortem inventory; according to an annotated copy of the catalog in the Institut national d’histoire de l’art, Paris, the dealer Vincent Donjeux bought them at the sale for 6100 *livres*.

[36] Paris, Archives nationales (hereafter AN), M.C., LXXXIV-546, 18 October 1776, no. 282.

[37] Paris, AN, M.C., LXXXIV-546, 18 October 1776, no. 291. Remy and Julliot, *Catalogue... Randon de Boisset*, pt. 2, p. 131, lot. 445. Valued at 1600 *livres* in the post-mortem inventory, the pair sold for 3001 *livres* at the sale. In a subsequent entry in the sale catalog, readers were informed of the rarity of *verdo antico* and how hard it was to procure. Remy and Julliot, *Catalogue... Randon de Boisset*, pt. 2, p. 13, lot. 447.

[38] Pierre Remy and J.B. Glomy, *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, sculptures, tant de marbre que de bronze, desseins et estampes des plus grands maîtres, porcelaines anciennes, meubles précieux, bijoux et autres effets qui composent le cabinet de feu Monsieur le duc de Tallard* (Paris: Chez Didot, 1756), iv.

[39] On porphyry, see Malgouyres, *Porphyre*.

[40] See Durand et al., *Decorative Furnishings*, 447.

[41] “Fameux vestiges de la grandeur des anciens Romains,” Remy and Glomy, *Catalogue . . . Tallard*, 236, lot 971, illustration facing p. 236. The column was acquired by Randon de Boisset (Remy and Julliot, *Catalogue... Randon de Boisset*, lot. 441), and subsequently purchased at his sale by the duc de Chaulnes. The column is discussed and the print from the Tallard catalog is reproduced in Ronald Freyberger, “The Randon de Boisset Sale,” 302.

[42] James Parker, “Introduction: Louis-Marie-Augustin, Duc D’Aumont (1709-1782), His Activities as a Collector,” in *Le Cabinet du duc d’Aumont: A Facsimile Reprint of the 1870 Edition Recording the Auction of 1782* (New York: Acanthus, 1986), xiii; Koeppe and Giusti, *Art of the Royal Court*, 280. These workshops await study, but new light will undoubtedly be shed on them in the forthcoming exhibition catalog focused on the work of Pierre Gouthière, the bronze chaser and gilder who mounted most of the duc d’Aumont’s hardstone and porcelain vases. See Charlotte Vignon et al., *Pierre Gouthière: Virtuoso Gilder at the French Court* (New York: The Frick Collection; London: D Giles Ltd, forthcoming, 2016).

[43] Recent studies of his collection have tended to focus on his Asian porcelains. See Stéphane Castelluccio, “Louis Marie Augustin, duc d’Aumont (1709-1782): un grand collectionneur de porcelaines orientales,” in *The French Porcelain Society Journal* 4 (2011): 69-95, and Vríz, “Le duc d’Aumont,” each with further bibliography. For a study that integrates his porcelain and hardstone vases, see Patricia Lemonnier, “Un collection exceptionnelle de vases montés,” *L’Estampille/L’Objet d’art*, no. 233 (1991): 38-49, and Parker, “Introduction.” Thirty objects from the duc d’Aumont’s collection were illustrated in the catalog of his estate sale. P. F. Julliot and A. J. Paillet, *Catalogue des*

vases, colonnes, tables de marbres rares, figures de bronze, porcelaines de choix, laques, meubles précieux, pendules, lustres... et autres effets importants qui composent le cabinet de feu M. le duc d'Aumont (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Didot l'aîné, 1782). The preparatory watercolors at the back of a copy of the catalog now in the BnF, Rés V2856, are available online on Gallica, and give a sense of their rich coloristic effects. See <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8626797p.r>

[44] Vickers, "Hamilton, Geology;" Carey, "Aiming High," 735-737.

[45] Pierre-Jean Mariette, *Traité des pierres gravées* (Paris: l'Imprimerie de l'auteur, 1750), 1: 218-26. Mariette reasoned that porcelain came to Rome from China via India, but that its Chinese origins, like the Chinese themselves, were unknown to the ancients, hence Pliny's generic reference to it as being from Asia. See also Carey, "Aiming High," 737; Vickers, "Hamilton, Geology," 267.

[46] Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus, "Des vases dont les anciens faisoient usage dans les festins (1749)," in *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres avec les Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de cette Académie* 23 (1756), 342-68, 353 for the identification of myrrhine ware as Chinese porcelain. Mariette and Caylus's claims reached a wider audience through Louis de Jaucourt's adaptations of their texts in his entry "vase myrrhin" published in the *Encyclopédie* in 1765. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: Briasson, 1751-1772), 16: 853-854.

[47] Pierre-Toussaint Dechazelle, *Discours qui a obtenu la mention honorable sur cette question proposée par l'Institut national: Quelle est l'influence de la Peinture sur les Arts d'industrie commerciale? Faire connoître les avantages que l'État retire de cette influence, et ceux qu'il peut encore s'en promettre* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Crapelet, 1804), 30. On Dechazelle's essay, see David Irwin, "Art versus Design: The Debate 1760-1860," *Journal of Design History* 4, no. 4 (1991): 219-232, esp. 227-228.

[48] "[I]l n'en est pas de la porcelaine comme des médailles antiques, qui donnent la science des tems reculés. La vieille porcelaine, pour être ornée de quelque caractère Chinois, ne marque aucun point d'histoire." J.B.P Lebrun, *Catalogue raisonné des marbres... formant le cabinet de Madame la Duchesse Mazarin* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie de Prault, 1781), 17.

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