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# Gallivanting teapots

**Birth and evolution  
of an art of living**

**21.06.2019**

**13.09.2020**



**Un musée  
Ville de Genève**

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VILLE DE  
GENÈVE

# Gallivanting Teapots

**21.06.2019**  
—  
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## Birth and evolution of an art of living

Originating in China in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the teapot was to spread at lightning speed, being brought to Europe by the large East India Companies. More than just a utilitarian object well-known today in our parts of the world, the teapot is also testimony to an art of living that developed around the drinking of tea. Over the centuries, this exotic beverage was to pervade all levels of society.

Composed of a body, spout, handle and lid, each teapot has its own particular characteristics. Evocation of this form and its history enables us to discover the richness of the museum's collections, whose diversity of styles, decorative designs and added elements are indicative of a constantly-evolving fashion trend.

This exhibition also appeals to your senses. As well as sight, both smell and taste will be solicited, rarely called upon in a museum.

The Musée Ariana has over 330 teapots in its collections. While 74 of them can be viewed in the galleries, many others are hidden away in the storerooms. This exhibition is an opportunity to discover the formal, stylistic and decorative evolution of this fascinating object over the course of 500 years.

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# A 1000-year-old shrub

The first bowl moistens my lips and throat.  
 The second shatters the walls of my sad loneliness.  
 The third searches the dry rivulets of my soul,  
 But to find the stories of five thousand scrolls.  
 The fourth raises a light perspiration,  
 And all life's grievances vanish through my pores.  
 The fifth purifies my flesh and bones.  
 The sixth makes me one with the immortals.  
 The seventh bowl I need not drink,  
 Feeling a fresh wind rising beneath my wings.

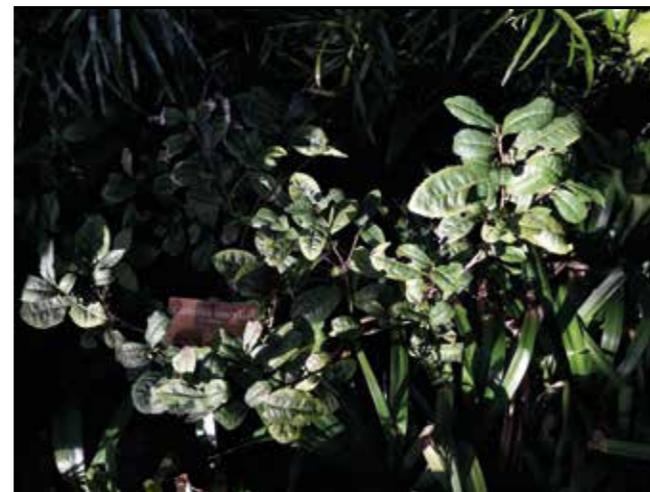
Lu Tong (795-835) poet and tea master

The origin of tea has come down to us through three legends.

According to Chinese legend, tea was discovered by the emperor Shennong in 2737 BCE. Known as the "Divine Farmer", he is credited with introducing hygiene by making his people drink hot water to prevent illness. One day, while travelling through his kingdom, he stopped on a hill to contemplate the landscape. His servant poured him a bowl of hot water and the emperor fell asleep. When he awoke, he noticed that some leaves had fallen into his bowl. Observing that the water had taken on a greenish hue, he smelled it and found that it gave off a fragrance. On tasting it, he felt a great force rush through him. And this is how tea was born!

The Indian tale relates the story of the prince Bodhidharma in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, who vowed not to sleep for nine years in order to preach Buddhism in China. After three years of meditating, he is said to have fallen asleep. Divine inspiration then told him to tear off some leaves of a shrub growing nearby and to chew them. He found that they allowed him to return to the state of concentration necessary for his meditation.

The Japanese version differs slightly, in that it tells how the prince finally succumbed to sleep and woke up furious with himself for having failed in his aim. As a result, he decided to cut off his eyelids, so that his eyes would remain open, and threw them on the ground. A few years later, he returned to the same spot and found that two large shrubs had grown there. He tasted the leaves and realised they had the power to keep him awake.



Tea grows as a shrub - *Camellia sinensis* - which belongs to the *Theaceae* plant family. Though it can reach up to 10-15 metres in height in the wild in south-western China, when pruned into a shrub these days it grows no taller than 1-1.5 metres. It is cultivated in hot, humid regions (Fujian, Hunan, Sichuan, Guangdong) for its leaves that, when dried, are used to make tea. It has been known and utilised since the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) for its therapeutic virtues.

All the different kinds of tea that exist are obtained from this single species. It's the varying treatments of the leaves, such as withering, rolling, fermentation or drying, that creates such diversity (white tea, yellow tea, green tea, black tea, red tea, oolong tea). The more processing steps the leaves undergo, the darker their colour becomes.

- 1 Engraving "The true tea shrub"  
 Pierre Joseph Buc'hoz, *Histoire universelle du règne végétal*, vol. 4, Paris, 1775-1778.
- 2 *Camellia sinensis*, Conservatory and Botanical Garden, Geneva  
 Temperate greenhouse. Cultivated specimen No. 20120262J0  
 N° IPEN: XXG20120262
- 3 *Cat merchants and tea sellers in Peking harbour*.  
 Clément Pellé, *L'empire chinois, illustré d'après des dessins [...] par Thomas Allom [...]*,  
 vol. 1, Londres - [1845?]
- 4 *Tea cultivation and the preparation of tea leaves in China*.  
 Clément Pellé, *L'empire chinois, illustré d'après des dessins [...] par Thomas Allom [...]*,  
 vol. 1, Londres - [1845?]

# The art of drinking tea

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*"We drink tea to forget the noise of the world."*

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Lu Yu (733-804), tea master during the Tang Dynasty (618-907)

The history of teapots is closely linked to the art of drinking tea. From one period to the next, tea leaves have undergone different treatments.

Three distinct periods can be identified.

The period of boiled tea

Under the Tang Dynasty (618-907), tea was boiled. The harvested leaves were steamed before being crushed into fine particles and compressed into moulds of various shapes to form small tea "bricks" or "cakes". These bricks, easily transportable by road, soon became a kind of bartering currency and were found in a range of values, weights and shapes (ball, disk, brick, etc.). Some were decorated with carved inscriptions of traditional motifs or ideograms.

In preparing the tea for drinking, the tea bricks were first roasted to eliminate any insects, before being ground, sifted, boiled with salt and enhanced with various ingredients like ginger, spices, milk or onions. The tea thus obtained was ladled into stoneware bowls. This way of drinking tea is still practiced in Tibet and Mongolia, where it is mixed with salt and yak butter.

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*"The three qualities of tea: a-ja, baja, ra-ja  
Put them in the copper pot Bkra-çis khyil-ba  
(whirlpool of Good Fortune)  
Enhance the tea's taste with white salt  
from the north  
Improve its colour with milk from a cow  
who calved last year."*

---

Extract from The Epic of King Gesar,  
11<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan epic cycle



1

Buddhism was probably one factor that contributed to the consumption of tea, as it helped monks to stay awake during their long hours of meditation.

Another factor was the writing of the book on tea by the great scholar Lu Yu (733-804), the now famous *Cha Jing* or *The Classic of Tea* which stimulated a great deal of interest in this beverage among the literati (scholar bureaucrats) of the day. This treatise, which focused on the origin of tea as well as its varieties, cultivation and processing methods, raised tea to the rank of a courtly art and a true symbol of refinement. According to Lu Yu, three elements are vital for making good tea: the quality and temperature of the water and the infusion time. The dishes, utensils and poems on tea consumption discovered in Tang tombs underline the importance attached to this drink.



2

The period of powdered tea

Under the Song Dynasty (960-1279), tea was powdered. Using a grindstone, the leaves were reduced to a fine powder, which was then whisked into hot water with a bamboo beater to obtain a creamy, frothy liquid. By this time, tea was becoming widespread in China and developing into a national drink. Lovers of this beverage organised informal tea-tasting gatherings and contests, while potters made ceramic bowls so that its flavour could be better appreciated.

Concurrently, tea and the first tea plants were being introduced into Japan. The consumption of tea gradually became part of the Japanese people's way of life. Today, this method of preparation is still used for the *chanoyu* tea ceremony.



3

The period of infused tea

In 1391, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a decree by the emperor Hong Wu imposed a return to simplicity. Taxes were no longer to be paid in the form of compressed tea bricks but as tea leaves.

The dried and roasted tea leaves were now steeped in hot water. This latest way of preparing tea led to the creation of a brand-new utensil: the teapot, rendering obsolete the equipment used previously, such as the grindstone, sieve, beater and ladle.

Probably first used in the Middle Kingdom in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the teapot was to spread around the world at lightning speed. Europeans first discovered this new exotic beverage, infused tea, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the merchants of the Dutch East India Company or VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie).

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1 Tea bricks

2 Powdered tea

3 Tea leaves

# The genesis of a form

The origin of the teapot is uncertain. Some historians believe that it derives from ceramic kettles, while others think it came from Chinese bronze jugs for alcohol known as (*he*). These vessels, used for fermented drinks during the Shang dynasty (1570-1045 BCE), do indeed possess all the teapot's constituent elements (body, handle, spout and lid) but usually have three or four feet.

Researchers do agree, however, that the first teapots appeared in the Yixing region (Jiangsu province) in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware in Hong Kong holds in its collections the oldest known teapot, which dates from 1513 and is signed by the potter Gong Chun.

The teapot is a vessel used for steeping the tea leaves and for serving tea. Today, they are made in all kinds of materials such as stoneware, terracotta, porcelain, earthenware, glass, cast iron, tin, silver, etc. Depending on the material used, teapots can be divided into ones "with memory" or those "without memory". The first type includes stoneware or terracotta teapots, which are porous and non-vitrified and so can retain the taste of the tea, while the second kind are of cast iron, glass, metal or glazed porcelain, which are said to be "without memory" because the walls cannot absorb the flavour of the tea particles.

Teapots are composed of four sections: the body, lid, handle and spout. They differ from coffee pots in having a generally fatter body and by the presence of an internal filter, between the body and the entrance to the spout.

Teapots can be made using a variety of techniques. The body can be thrown, moulded, modelled or cast. They can be of all shapes and sizes, with each era having its preferences as to their design, decoration, material or size.

If the techniques used to make teapots are diverse, so are their designs. The body can be geometrical in form (square, rectangular, pyramidal), or shaped like a pear (pyriform), a cylinder (known as "litron" in French), a sphere (spherical) or even a lotus flower (lotiform). Many of these shapes originate from Far Eastern designs, whether from China, Korea or Japan.

The handle, which makes it possible to hold the object, must be sufficiently distanced from the body to allow at least one finger to pass through the intervening space. It can be rounded, raised, angular, lobed, moulded or plant-inspired depending on changing fashions and eras. It is generally placed vertically and on the opposite side to the spout.

The spout, for its part, which is used to pour the tea, can be straight, curved, S-shaped or plant-inspired. Ceramists usually align it with the handle, but it can also be placed perpendicular to it. The spout is the most complex element, as a good teapot needs to pour correctly.

The lid, fitting on top of or into the body, is either flat or rounded and has some kind of knob or finial to facilitate lifting.

Liquid clay (slip) is used to cement these cast or modelled elements to the body. A teapot is a complex object to create as the various elements must be made simultaneously so that they benefit from the same drying time and thus maintain a certain balance.



1 Diversity of handles  
2 Diversity of spouts  
3 Diversity of knobs

# Purple teapots

## The Song of Tea

“Ah, how wonderful is this tea gathered before the kindly breeze has dissipated the pearls of frost from its leaves.

And whose tiny buds shine like gold!

Packed fresh and its aroma brought out by roasting.

Its essential goodness has been preserved and nothing wasted.

This tea was intended for the court and the high nobility,

How did it get to the hut of a poor mountain man?

[...]

To honour the tea, I barred my gate with branches

So that no common folk could intrude,

And I took my diaphanous cup

To prepare and enjoy it all alone.”

Lu Tong (795-835),  
poet and tea master

The city of Yixing, in Jiangsu Province, 200 km from Shanghai, has a long tradition of ceramic production. Yixing stoneware, composed of purple clay, kaolin, quartz, silica, mica and iron, is particularly appreciated for making teapots. Their fame is due to the specific qualities of the stoneware, as well as to the dexterity of the local ceramists, who have given full rein to their creativity in terms of decorative designs, forms as well as colours.

These stoneware pieces are fired at temperatures ranging between 1100°C and 1200°C in an oxidizing atmosphere. Deliberate under-firing of the stoneware makes it possible to limit vitrification and so ensure a certain porosity for the walls, which can thus retain the tea's flavour and enhance it over the years. This is why it's advisable to make only one type of tea in a particular teapot.

Over the centuries, Yixing teapots have developed a broad formal and decorative repertoire. It's therefore possible to find geometric shapes, others inspired by bronze wares from Antiquity or by Jingdezhen porcelain, as well as ones influenced by natural forms, which remain the most popular. The potters have drawn inspiration from and re-used ancestral forms at the same time as creating new designs.

A Yixing teapot is traditionally hand-crafted by a single potter, unlike the collective work practices employed today in the Jingdezhen porcelain factories. Its construction combines different techniques: slab work, wheel-throwing and stamping. When the piece is not thrown, all forms become possible. The artists play with the diversity of the body shapes but also express their creativity through the appearance of handles, spouts and knobs. These teapots have either a half-ball internal filter or are pierced with a network of small holes at the entrance to the spout to strain the tea leaves.



3

4

A Yixing teapot is considered a success when the tea flows out easily and the added elements are aligned on the same horizontal plane: this is the rule of the three levels. Similarly, in order to create a harmonious whole, the shape of the spout and the handle always correspond to that of the body. If the body is quadrangular, the spout and handle must also be quadrangular.

The first teapots, made in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, have a relatively large volume but become smaller in size at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to meet the requirements of tea adepts, either in order to use tea more sparingly or to enhance the aroma. The Chinese literati (high government officials) were great tea lovers; some even financially supported the work of young potters or got involved in the creation of teapots. They preferred sober, elegant teapots, sometimes embellished with motifs borrowed from Chinese painting or calligraphy.

As well as being of interest for the Chinese market, these teapots were also exported to Asia and Europe, where they were enthusiastically received. Thanks to the first Dutch East India Company's traders, they travelled with the tea shipments to the markets of Amsterdam. These red stoneware items had a definite influence on European ceramic production, as in Delft, where three potters, Lambertus Cleffius, Samuel van Eenhoorn and Ary de Milde made wheel-thrown red teapots in 1665, decorated with Yixing style motifs.

They were also to be a source of inspiration for the English manufactories in Staffordshire, where brothers David and Philip Elers, originally from Holland, also made “Chinese red porcelain” in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Their forms and designs drew on both Yixing teapots and on English silverware designs, themselves influenced by Yixing teapots. Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682-1719) likewise produced red stoneware at the Meissen factory in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Though referred to as “Yixing teapots” since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when they first arrived in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they were known as *boccaro*, derived from *buccaro*, Mexican pottery of a similar colour imported into Portugal during the previous century.

Today, the production of teapots in Yixing is still thriving, including both industrial wares, made by pouring the clay into plaster moulds, and artists' pieces.

- 1 Teapot, Yixing (China), 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Red stoneware – W. 17 cm H. 11.5 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 Teapot, Yixing (China), c.1700  
Red stoneware – W. 15 cm H. 10.5 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 Half-ball filter
- 4 Filter holes

# Porcelain teapots from the Middle Kingdom

The first Chinese porcelain teapots to arrive in Europe were in the Blue and White style, characterised by the use of a single oxide for the underglaze decoration: cobalt blue.

At the time, teapots intended for export were generally spherical with a domed lid, a rounded handle and a straight, slanted spout, unlike those for the Chinese market which had a curved, S-shaped spout.

The teapots in the Musée Ariana's collections feature a range of different styles, in terms of both form and iconography, such as the teapot with a four-lobed body and lid, high handle and curved spout, reminiscent of ancient Chinese wine jugs. Its basketry handle, making it easier to serve the tea, adds a certain verticality to the object.

The teapot with a curved, S-shaped spout dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but was enriched a century later with silver elements added to the handle, spout and lid. This practice of embellishing porcelain with precious metals (silver or gilded bronze) began in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a way of enhancing and accentuating the exoticism of Chinese porcelain.



2

The civil war that broke out in China in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (1647-1682) led to the closure of the Jingdezhen manufactories. The Dutch, who dominated the markets for tea and teapots, could therefore no longer obtain Chinese porcelain and so turned to Japan to satisfy the demand from Europe.

In 1680, production of Chinese porcelain resumed. The Japanese Imari style, with its gleaming colours, was then copied by the Jingdezhen makers. Chinese Imari-style teapots typically have three-coloured ornamentation: the underglaze cobalt blue, combined with iron red and gold applied to the already glazed surface. The decorative designs popular with Europeans at the time were floral motifs, endowed with powerful symbolic connotations, even though they were unaware of such meanings.

In the same period, Chinese potters created new colour palettes to regain leadership of the porcelain market and counter the competition from Japan. The Famille verte (green family) porcelain, developed during the reign of Qing dynasty emperor Kangxi (1661-1722), is characterised by the use of a range of translucent, overglaze green enamels produced from copper oxide. The decorative motifs on the teapots are no different from those found on export ware (flowers, plants and real or imaginary animals). The ornamentation shows perfect mastery of composition, with clever and vigorous designs that extend over the completely rounded surface of the teapot, as well as onto the handle, flat lid and straight, slanted spout.



1



3

The high-quality ornamentation, the absence of overcharged decoration, the effects achieved through the skilful juxtaposition of touches of colour, together with the exoticism of the motifs justify the attraction in Europe for these objects. Under the influence of the emperor Kangxi, a great tea lover, another method of drinking tea developed in China. Tea was served in a covered bowl that not only retained the heat but also gently pushed down the tea leaves that were steeping in the water.



4

The Famille rose (pink family) style of porcelain was created during the reign of the emperor Qianlong (1735-1796). As with Famille verte porcelain, the decoration was added on top of the glaze, that is, after a first firing. Famille rose ware is characterised by the use of the pigment known as Purple of Cassius, combined with an arsenic-based opaque white. The polychrome enamels employed for the floral motifs and the abundance of gilding turned these pieces into precious objects, reminiscent of rich brocades. The spherical shape of the early teapots was still appreciated during the Qing dynasty.



5

- 1 Teapot, China, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Porcelain, blue underglaze decoration – W. 13.5 cm H. 18 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 Teapot, China, c.1700  
Porcelain, blue underglaze decoration, silver (19<sup>th</sup> century)  
W. 18 cm H. 12.5 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 Teapot, China, c.1700  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel decoration – W. 20 cm H. 11.5 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 4 Bowl, saucer and lid, China, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Porcelain, blue underglaze decoration – Diam. 9.5 cm (bowl)  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 5 Teapot, China, c.1730  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel and gold decoration – W. 15.5 cm H. 12.5 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# The tea ceremony in Japan, a sophisticated art

There is a subtle charm in the taste of tea which makes it irresistible and capable of idealisation.

[...]

Tea has neither the arrogance of wine, nor the affectation of coffee, let alone the simpering innocence of cocoa."

Okakura Kakuzo (1863-1913),  
Japanese writer.

It was through the Buddhist monks that tea first came to Japan. Tradition has it that the monk Dengyō Daishi (767-822) was the first to bring tea bricks and tea plants back from China in the year 805, during the reign of Emperor Saga (786-842). The boiled tea would only have met with an entirely relative interest at the time.

It was not until the Zen master Eisai (1141-1215) returned from China that powdered tea was introduced to Japan, as practiced by the Chinese during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). This creamy emulsion was obtained by whisking *matcha* green tea powder into hot water in a bowl with a bamboo beater. It was drunk in monasteries for its therapeutic virtues but also to help monks maintain their concentration.

Tea culture was at its height in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the tea ceremony became ritualised. With the great master Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), tea became an art, a philosophy and even a religion. He codified the relationship between tea, Buddhism and the various schools of tea. He identified the spirit of the "Way of Tea" with its four fundamental principles of harmony, respect, purity and serenity central to this ceremony known as *chanoyu*, literally meaning "the hot water of tea". High-ranking military officials, followed by the rich merchant class, first adopted this practice before it spread to all levels of society towards the end of the century.

A large set of utensils is required for the tea ceremony. The tea bowl or *chawan* is the main element, as it is the link between host and guest. Its weight and curved form must be perfectly adapted to the palms of both hands. Depending on the period and the fashions of the day, it can be made of stoneware, terracotta or porcelain and be either plain or, conversely, painted with polychrome decoration.

The *matcha* tea powder is carefully stored in a tea caddy or *chaire*, generally wrapped in a silk or brocaded cloth. Made of stoneware decorated with brown, green and yellow enamels, this small cylindrical tea caddy has an ivory lid.

Three bamboo utensils are employed, the *chashaku*, or spoon, used to scoop the green tea powder into the bowl, a ladle, known as a *hishaku*, to add the water, and the *chasen* or beater, with which the host whisks the mixture in order to obtain a creamy tea.

Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese often utilised stoneware vessels. From 1620 onwards, advocates of the tea ceremony, monks, high-ranking samurai and some of the high nobility favoured Chinese art objects instead. They were interested in the Blue and White type of porcelain and commissioned a variety of recipients adapted to their needs, such as this *mizusashi* water container decorated with vine branches, or these *mukozuke* dishes. The latter, used to serve foods seasoned with vinegar during the tea ceremony, could be made in the form of animals or plants, like this hare and pomegranate. The realistic shapes are enhanced with painted morphological details, as in the foliage and for the eyes, ears and paws of the hare that symbolises longevity. These objects, specifically aimed at the Japanese market, would have met the aesthetic criteria appreciated in Japan: simplicity, sobriety and naturalness.



- 1 Tea caddy, *chaire*, Japan, 18th century  
Glazed stoneware, ivory – Diam. 6 cm. H. 8.5 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 *Mukozuke* dishes, Jingdezhen (China), c.1625  
Porcelain, blue underglaze decoration – W. 16.4 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 *Mizusashi* water container, China, c.1630  
Porcelaneous stoneware, blue underglaze decoration – Diam. 14.3 cm. H. 16 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# Tea in the courts of Europe

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the travellers, sailors and Jesuit missionaries who roamed the seas brought back the earliest reports of tea, thus becoming the first European tea drinkers, benefiting from the experiences gained through their voyages.

Yet it was not until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century that the first shipment of tea was to arrive in Holland. In the second half of the same century, tea, Yixing red stoneware teapots and Jingdezhen porcelain teapots were all imported to Holland and spread across Europe thanks to the Dutch merchants.

The introduction of tea to this continent was the source of much controversy. Some people were quick to demonize it, while others fell under the spell of this new, invigorating drink. At the time, tea was sold in apothecary shops and remained expensive, being a luxury commodity for a wealthy elite. The very rare teapots were soon copied to meet the demands of European tea lovers.

From 1660, teapots were included in the Delftware range, with designs that imitated Chinese spherical teapots. The city of Delft benefited from the presence there of one of the six Chambers of the Dutch East India Company. The price of tea decreased finally in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, encouraging the spread of tea drinking to all levels of society in the Netherlands. The Dutch dominated the export market for tea and teapots for most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, before the English took over this monopoly throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century.

One might ask why tea was so popular with Europeans? We shouldn't forget that the only drinks consumed at the time were alcoholic ones (wine, beer), as people were wary of water, which could carry disease. Tea had the advantage of being a hot, stimulating and non-alcoholic beverage, like the other two exotic drinks very much in fashion, coffee and chocolate.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all European porcelain and earthenware makers produced teapots, initially imitating the shapes and decorative designs of the examples imported from China before liberating themselves from their influence.



1



2

The shapes of the two teapots shown above, in Meissen porcelain and Delft earthenware, were inspired by Yixing stoneware and Jingdezhen porcelain teapots. They thus have a spherical body, a domed lid, a rounded handle and a straight, slanted spout. Their decorative designs have a certain exoticism typical of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Meissen teapot is embellished with Turkish-style motifs, while the Delftware one has Chinoiserie designs in colours characteristic of the Japanese Imari style, combining cobalt blue with red and gold.



3



4

In the years 1780-85, the spherical and piriform teapots were almost entirely replaced by cylindrical ones (known in French as "litron"), reflecting the fashions of the day, which advocated a return to simple forms inspired by Greek and Roman art. These teapots usually have a flat lid that fits into a collar and is pierced with a small hole to let out steam. The knob can resemble a sphere, a small fruit or an acorn. The makers added a thumb rest to the handles to offer a better grip.

By the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the teapot had become an everyday item for the middle classes and all ceramics producers included them in their catalogues. However, the general trend among these manufacturers was to create bold new forms, more or less inspired by earlier designs, while reinterpreting elements such as the handle or spout.

- 1 *Teapot*, Meissen (Germany), 1715-1740  
Porcelain, polychrome enamels and gold decoration – W. 16.6 cm H. 11.3 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 *Teapot*, Delft (Netherlands), c.1785  
Earthenware, blue grand feu and polychrome petit feu decoration  
W. 12.7 cm H. 19.3 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 *Teapot*, Sèvres (France), 1846-1847  
Porcelain, blue ground, polychrome enamel and gold decoration  
W. 20 cm H. 14 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 4 *Teapot handle with thumb rest*, Meissen (Germany) c. 1740  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel and gold decoration  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# A tea service marked with blue crossed swords

The Meissen factory was created under the enthusiastic impetus of the Elector of Saxony Frederick Augustus I, known as Augustus the Strong, who wished to be the first in Europe to discover the secret of manufacturing porcelain. In around 1706-07, the young alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682-1719), working in co-operation with the scientist Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus (1651-1708), managed to produce a compact, red stoneware that was called *Böttgerzeug* (meaning "Böttger ware"), which imitated that of Yixing teapots. In 1710, the first white porcelain was created in the kilns of this manufactory, established in the castle of Albrechtsburg in Meissen, a veritable fortress dominating the River Elbe, where the secret of the "white gold" could be well protected.

If, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the elements making up a tea service were of different shapes, materials and decorative designs, the ensemble took on a more homogeneous character in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the development of the French-style service. Though the idea did indeed come from France, it was in Meissen that the first great tea services were made. Until 1730, teacups had been no different from those used for the other exotic drinks, coffee and chocolate. Yet from then on, they were to become wider and lower to set them apart from the others. While people in China drank tea from small bowls, the Europeans, for their part, preferred cups with handles for a better grip. The addition of one or more handles is a European invention.

Breakfast services became an increasingly important outlet for porcelain production, being produced in sets for one or two people. Some services contained two teapots with different capacities; one for green tea and the other for black tea.

This porcelain tea service with polychrome decoration dates from 1760-1775 and can be identified by the well-known Meissen mark of two blue crossed swords. This particular set consists of 22 pieces in total, of which the seven elements on show make up the core of the service. The flattened spherical teapot has a spout in the form of a dragon, influenced by an Eastern design and a handle with a thumb rest. Around the teapot on its stand are Rococo style objects found on the tables of the aristocracy at that time. The cup with a handle and saucer, the sugar bowl, the milk jug, the tea caddy and the rinsing bowl, used to clear the tea leaves from the cup.

These objects combine harmonious forms with rich painted motifs, which stand out in beautiful contrast against the whiteness of the porcelain. The decoration consists of a chequered background with small green arrows, painted with great precision, and garlands of German flowers that appear to float on the curved parts of the teapot and to form spirals on the flat surfaces. The designs are exquisitely enhanced by gilding.

Daisies, roses, buttercups, a tulip and anemones can all be identified. The "return to nature" trend, which began around 1725 at the factory of Claude-Innocent Du Paquier in Vienna, led to the creation of more natural designs in 1732-33 at Meissen, such as the "German flowers" motifs. The latter were inspired by engraved plates or drawings by botanists and served as models for the painting studios of the large European porcelain manufactories.



- 1 *Tea service*, Meissen (Germany), 1760-1775  
Porcelain, polychrome enamels and gold decoration – W. 18 cm H. 11.3 cm (teapot)  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 *Tea cup*, Meissen (Germany), 1760-1775  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel and gold decoration – Diam. 8 cm H. 4.5 cm (teapot)  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 *Coffee cup*, Meissen (Germany), 1760-1775  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel and gold decoration – Diam. 7 cm H. 6.8 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 4 *Teapot base*, Mark of the Meissen manufactory (Germany), 1760-1775  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# Tea time in England

Tea was brought to England by Dutch merchants in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as a very costly exotic drink. Catherine of Braganza is credited with introducing it to the Royal Court after her marriage to Charles II in 1661. The East India Company began to take an interest in tea in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first *coffee houses* were established in London, serving coffee, tea, fruit brandies and rum. Yet it was only in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the fashion for tea escalated, with the opening in 1717 by Thomas Twining of the first tea shop, "The Golden Lyon", accessible to women, unlike the *coffee houses*.

Tea contributed to the success of English ceramics. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the county of Staffordshire in central England was one of the most productive areas for ceramics, renowned in particular for its teapots and tea services. Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795), who came from a family of potters, founded a manufactory in Etruria in 1769 that gave industrial production an impetus and a quality previously unknown. The factory's output is characterised by his taste for Antiquity, producing objects in a form of stoneware called *Jasperware* from the 1770s-1780s, either coloured throughout (then known as "solid") or covered with a tinted slip ("dip" or "dipped"). The manufacturers turned the tea service into a fashion item, inviting people to replace their services regularly to keep up with the latest trends. Cabinetmakers made tea tables, trolleys or small cabinets in which the tea could be locked safely away to prevent servants from stealing this precious commodity.

This *black basalt* teapot (1785-1790) reproduces the matt appearance of classical Greek and Etrurian vases. The wheel-thrown body with a decoration of guilloché fluting is distinguished by the purity of its form and by its lid with a finial in the shape of a cloaked woman.



1

The blue teapot with a cylindrical body, from a later period (1840-1850), is covered with a layer of light blue slip and is known as *blue dip Jasperware*. The white moulded and applied elements come from a neoclassical design by John Flaxman, a talented draughtsman who worked as a modeller for Wedgwood. It depicts the Three Graces dancing, within a plant-inspired design in the form of a frieze that emphasises the teapot's shape. The figures' veils are so fine as to be almost transparent. Cylindrical body shapes of this kind first appeared in England in the 1720s, under the reign of George I.

Though neoclassical motifs remained in fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the size of the teapots was adapted to the ever-increasing consumption of this beverage in Britain. The teapot made of red stoneware known as *Rosso Antico* by the Josiah Wedgwood factory, with its classical-inspired decor, is a testament to the democratisation of tea.

In order to break the Chinese monopoly, the British established tea cultivation in India. The planting of the species *Camellia sinensis*, imported from China to India by them from 1848, further encouraged tea consumption. At the same time, in Assam, in eastern India, the variety of tea *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* was discovered. This better-adapted and more resistant variety was then exclusively grown in India by the British.

It gave the black tea drunk with milk and sugar for afternoon tea and Afternoon tea in Britain, which were to become the very essence of the country's culture and social events par excellence, with a teapot being central to the ritual. Afternoon tea dates back to the 1840s, when Anna Russell, Duchess of Bedford (1783-1857) started the practice of having a tray of tea served with buttered bread and cakes brought up to her room towards 5pm, in order to keep hunger at bay until the evening meal, served around 8.30-9.30 pm.



2



3

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, tea rooms had begun to spring up all over the country and to spread throughout the British Empire. They served tea accompanied by scones with fresh cream and jam at affordable prices, meaning that working class women could offer themselves a little luxury.

Tea bags, invented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by New York tea importer Thomas Sullivan, completed the transformation from luxury beverage to cheap industrial product.



4

Typically English, this small teapot from a child's tea set made at Wedgwood's Barlaston factory is decorated with a scene from the "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" written in 1902 by the British writer Beatrix Potter. The printed decoration on the rounded belly of the teapot depicts Mrs. Rabbit and her offspring. The lid is inscribed with the quotation: I am going out. Now run along, and don't get into mischief, reminding the little rabbits to behave themselves.

- 1 Teapot, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, Etruria (United Kingdom), 1785-1790  
Black basalt coloured stoneware – W. 18 cm H. 11 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 Teapot, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, Etruria (United Kingdom) mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
Blue dip Jasperware – W. 14.5 cm H. 8 cm – The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 Teapot, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, Etruria (United Kingdom), last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Red stoneware, applied decoration – W. 17.5 cm H. 12 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 4 Teapot, Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, Barlaston (United Kingdom), c. 1980  
Creamware, printed polychrome underglaze decoration – W 14 cm H. 10.5 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# Nature-inspired teapots

Potters' fascination for the animal and plant worlds dates back to the earliest vessels ever made by Man. Nature, with its vegetables, fruits, trees, flowers and animals, has consequently been an endless source of inspiration for the creators of ceramic teapots.

It's therefore hardly surprising to find teapots that evoke animal or plant forms among the wares produced by the Chinese. Their love of the many splendours of nature is painted, narrated and carved on them, with many of these representations being symbolic. This pair of seated deer, an animal popular with China's literati, symbolise longevity and regeneration because their antlers fall off and regrow.



The teapot resembling a bundle of bamboo stems signifies uprightness and piety as well as robustness and flexibility, since bamboo bends without breaking. This design, very popular in Yixing and copied in porcelain at Jingdezhen during the reign of the emperor Kangxi (1661-1722), was highly desirable among great European lovers of Chinese ceramics. In 1721, Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, purchased a Yixing stoneware teapot of this design for his collection. He also commissioned Johann Joachim Kändler (1706-1775), modeller at the Meissen factory, to create numerous porcelain sculptures representing animals. Kändler's rooster design, created in 1734 after the Elector's death four years previously, is well-suited to the shape of a teapot, with its rounded belly constituting the body, while the beak and tail serve respectively as spout and handle. Teapot designs in the form of a phoenix or a monkey are also known to have been produced at Meissen.

This naturalistic trend, which developed at the Meissen factory around 1720, encouraged makers of earthenware and porcelain to create increasingly realistic pieces, indicative of a general interest in botany and zoology. The teapot produced at the Künersberg factory in Bavaria is a good example of this, imitating a log of wood covered with beetles and featuring a squirrel hiding its hazelnuts among the leaves.

- 1 Teapot, China, c.1780  
Porcelain, Famille verte enamels decoration – W. 18 cm H. 27 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 2 Teapot, Jingdezhen (China), 1662-1722  
Porcelain, Famille verte enamels decoration – W. 15.5 cm H. 12 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 3 Teapot, Meissen (Germany), 1763-1774  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel decoration – W. 21.5 cm H. 16 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection

# A riot of handles, spouts and knobs

Ceramists also vied with one another through the ingenuity and creativity they showed in the making of spouts, handles or knobs inspired by animals or plants. This practice is found on Chinese and Japanese ceramics alike and was imitated on both silverware and ceramics in Europe. It's therefore possible to find added elements in the form of branches, a motif very dear to the Chinese, symbolising life and evoking the tenacity of the scholar who triumphs over all obstacles. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Herend porcelain manufactory in Hungary made free use of figurative ornaments such as rabbits and dragons on the handles, knobs and spouts of their teapots.

Contemporary artists are no exception to this attraction to nature. Exploiting the malleable qualities of the ceramic material, they create teapots designed to give the illusion of living things. Jean Marie Borgeaud (Switzerland, 1954) and Hugues de Crousaz (Switzerland, 1960) have made use of this practice in the celadon teapot with a zoomorphic handle on its lid in the form of an animal leaning over to drink from the spout.

Throughout its history, the teapot has been primarily a functional object, even though aesthetic aspects have always had an important role to play in its production, whether in ceramic manufactories or artists' studios.



20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century artists accord the status of works of art in their own right to their individual pieces, with the boundaries between applied and fine arts becoming increasingly blurred since the 1960s. Forms have tended to draw closer to sculpture, which artists desire to be large and extravagant, while moving away from the object's primary function.

In the showcase dedicated to contemporary artists, you can discover unusual, surprising and unique teapots, in an evolving display which will be modified at regular intervals throughout the duration of the exhibition.



- 4 Teapot on a pedestal "La Soif" (Thirst), 2003  
Jean Marie Borgeaud (Switzerland 1954) and Hugues de Crousaz (Switzerland, 1960)  
Porcelain and stoneware (pedestal) – W. 13.5 cm H. 21.5 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 5 Teapot, Herend (Hungary), c.1870  
Porcelain, polychrome enamel decoration and gold. – W. 14 cm H. 10.8 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection
- 6 Teapot, Yixing (China) last quarter of the 20th century  
Olive green coloured stoneware, relief-moulded decoration – W. 13 cm H. 10.8 cm  
The Musée Ariana Collection

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# Public programm

## Visites commentées

Les dimanches :

23 juin à 14h; 13 octobre 2019 à 11h

19 janvier, 17 mai, 13 septembre 2020 à 11h

*Gratuit, sans inscription*

## Visites commentées sur demande

En français, anglais ou allemand.

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**L'art de préparer le thé en Chine.**

**Avec Mark Drenhaus, Länggass-Tee**

Dimanche 22 septembre 2019 à 14h et à 15h

*Sur inscription (16 personnes max), CHF 15.–*

## Dégustation de thé japonais

**Avec Emiko Okamoto, Aux mille pins**

*(durée 1h)*

Dimanche 3 novembre 2019 à 14h et à 16h

Dimanche 26 avril 2020 à 14h et à 16h

*Sur inscription (20 personnes max), CHF 15.–*

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Du 22 février au 1<sup>er</sup> mars 2020

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## Chanoyu

**Cérémonie du thé japonaise**

**de l'École Urasenke**

**Par Hiromi Straub Yamada (durée 1h)**

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