

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Footed Bowl made for a Chairman of the East India Company

Canton (Guangzhou), China, ca. 1800

Basse-taille enamels on copper

19.5 cm high, 32 cm diameter

Stock no.: A5946

Provenance: Gifted to the Hon. William Fullerton Elphinstone (1740–1834), probably upon his retirement from the East India Company in 1826.

A footed bowl made from cast copper with turquoise and black floral basse-taille enamelling throughout the body. It was probably gifted to William Fullerton Elphinstone (1740–1834) upon his retirement from the East India Company in 1826. A matching set of three other footed bowls and a complete dessert service with this provenance was sold at Christie's, London, on 18 October 1994, lots 404 to 409. This footed bowl was missing its original handles, and the elephant-shaped handles have been recreated based on the images in this auction listing. In 2023, this set appeared in a joint exhibition, *A Splendid Blend of China and the West: Canton Enamels of the Qing Dynasty*, by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Shenzhen Museum.¹

The bowl bears the coat of arms of the Elphinstone Clan, comprising a quartered shield, with boars heads between chevrons. A woman from the waist up appears above the shield, holding in one hand a tower and in the other a laurel branch. The cross-hatching (quarters 1 and 4) and hatching (quarters 2 and 3) of the chevrons indicate the colours. The hatching represents gules (red) and the cross-hatching sable (black). The boar heads are also cross-hatched, representing sable. The Clan Elphinstone arms

traditionally feature three boars' heads gules, so the rendering in cross-hatch may have been a mistake by the artist. The motto *Caus Causeit* or 'cause causes it' is associated with the Elphinstone clan.²

This bowl belongs to a rare group of copper vessels made in Canton (Guangzhou) decorated with turquoise or basse-taille enamels and gold foil. They were made in the late 18th and early 19th century, during the reigns of Qianlong and Jiaqing. They have similar floral decoration to our bowl and foil borders. However, where our bowl features a foil coat of arms, they typically have the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. Examples of the blue type are in the Palace Museum, Beijing (nos 23217, 23855, 72430), all dated to the Qing dynasty.³ Another example of this group, this time in the form of a goblet, is in the Chinese University of Hong Kong Art Museum (no. 2018.0013), dated to the late 18th to early 19th century.⁴ Examples of the turquoise group were sold at auction, including a small bowl sold in Christie's, Hong Kong, in April 2002,⁵ and a bowl and cup sold in Sotheby's, Paris, in December 2019.⁶ A tray decorated with very similar green enamel is in the Hong Kong Palace Museum.⁷

The elephant handles are also typical of Chinese craftsmanship, a form which appears in early bronzes such as a Yuan period (1271–1368) vase in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 2019.264) or a pair of altar vases dating from ca. 1351 in the British Museum (accession no. PDF,B.614).

[1] For more information, including a virtual tour, visit

<https://www.shenzhenmuseum.com/exhibitiondetail?clazzName=CmsExhibition&resId=1dcb0777b17847069d94b1382f170d37&type=2>

[2] William, Fraser. *The Elphinstone Family Book of the Lords Elphinstone, Balmerino and Coupar*. Edinburgh: 1897.

[3] Can be viewed online at The Palace Museum,

https://intl.dpm.org.cn/collection_list.html

[4] Can be viewed online at <https://www.artmuseum.cuhk.edu.hk/en/collections/results/detail/15990>

[5] Christie's Hong Kong, *The Imperial Sale, Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, 29 April 2002, lot 573.

<https://www.christies.com/lot/a-rare-silver-and-gold-foil-enamelled-3905459/?intObjectID=3905459&lid=1>

[6] Sotheby's Paris, *Arts d'Asie*, 10 December 2019, lot 136.

<https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/arts-dasie/bol-et-coupelle-en-emaux-de-basse-taille-dynastie>

[7] Illustrated in Fuxiang, Guo. 'A Study of Guangdong Transparent Cloisonné in the Qing Dynasty', *Journal of Gugong Studies* 25 (2023), pp. 80–109: p. 98, figs 46, 47.