



Massive Cistern and Basin

Qianlong c1738

Dutch market

Cistern, height: 68.5 cm (27 inches)

Basin, length: 66 cm (26 inches)

A Chinese export famille rose baluster cistern and cover on flat base, with a thick rim and domed cover with finial, decorated in polychrome enamels with a Chinese archer in four elaborate cartouches, each with a shell above and a mask below, the masks connected by a floral garland. Between the cartouches the cistern has been decorated with butterflies, the shoulder and cover with a lappet pattern. The large oval basin has a swelling body narrowing into a horizontal waist and a wide everted rim on a high splayed foot with recessed base and painted with four masks with scrolls connected by a garland and a rosette on either side, the foot with a lappet border and a pattern on small squares and the inside with four large peony sprays and butterflies.

Pronk porcelain is one of the classic genres of Chinese Export Porcelain collecting and is much sought after by the cognoscenti. It illustrates perfectly the collision and miscegenation of styles between the Occident and the Orient and the porcelains produced are some of the highest quality export items ever made. Cornelis Pronk (1691-1759) was commissioned in 1734 by the Delft chamber of the Dutch East India Company to produce designs for the decoration of porcelains to be made in China. The Directors of the Company (known as the Heeren XVII) recorded this in a resolution of August 1734, which mentions extensive items of porcelain and four drawings, A-D.

The first of these is La Dame au Parasol (see the next item in this catalogue) and the original watercolour survives for this in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The second design was the Doctor's Visit To The Emperor and this is known on porcelain in two versions: the first has three seated figures and a fourth standing in the back and the later simplified version in which this standing figure is absent. The third design is not known and the fourth is The Harbour. The sources of influence on Pronk for these designs are not known though design A has possible sources on Kangxi teawares and design B may be derived from a Ming jar depicting three Taoist star kings playing chess who are interrupted by the woodcutter Wang. In these cases Pronk is designing Chinoiserie, Chinese scenes through a western eye, though what the Chinese painters, who eventually executed these designs, made of them has not been recorded.

There are a number of other designs attributed to Pronk mostly resulting from private trade orders from the supercargoes. The Archer (this example), the Handwashing Maidens and the Potentate are only known on large urns such as this, the Palmette is known on teawares and vases and the Phoenix and the Flame Dancer are

known on sconces. The Parrot and the Pekinese dog designs are mostly likely not by Pronk at all as they lack the elaborate borders and other designs that are characteristic of his work.

The purpose of these urns (or cisterns) is disputed - some argue that they were for dispensing wine and others suggest that they were for washing hands before taking tea. They were intended to have silver taps placed in the holes near the base though many of the examples are without taps today. The basins are very large indeed and about at the limit of size to be potted in one piece, which explains the mild undulation in the rim. Urns are also known with the Design B1, none are recorded with designs A or D, however an Imari palette basin is known with reeds and birds around taken from design A, so there may exist an urn for this item.

One of these other designs must be the candidate for the unidentified design C, those mostly likely being the Archer and the Handwashing. The Archer is known on just a few urns with accompanying basins such as this in famille rose or underglaze blue and white. This is the largest recorded example in famille rose.

REFERENCES:

KRAHL, R & HARRISON-HALL, J (1994) *Ancient Chinese Trade Ceramics from the British Museum*, London, p31, No 9, a blue and white jar with a central panel of an archer derived from a Persian original design, a possible source for this design.

JÖRG, CJA (1997) *Chinese Ceramics in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, p285, No 331 an urn, height 51cm and p 286, a basin width 66cm, both examples in famille rose but the urn is smaller than this example and the basin is the same size so they do not 'fit'.

JÖRG, CJA (1980), *Pronk Porcelain, Porcelain designs by Cornelis Pronk*, No 51, an urn and No 52 a basin, the same items as above in JÖRG, CJA (1997), and an excellent and detailed account of Pronk porcelain.

SCHEURLEER, LUNSINGH DF (1974) *Chinese Export Porcelain: Chine de Commande*, No 122 an urn and NO 123 a basin, the same items as above in JÖRG, CJA (1997).

HOWARD, DS & AYERS, J (1978) *China For The West, Vol I*, p295, an urn and discussion of Pronk porcelains.

HOWARD, David S. (1994), *The Choice of the Private Trader*, p241, No 285, an urn (53cm high) with the Potentate in famille rose.

WIRGIN, Jan (1998) *Från KINA till EUROPA*, p176, No 191, a basin in Imari with elements from Pronk designs including reeds and waterbirds from design A and panels of three fish from design B.

Sold for £64,000 to a private US collector