



GEORGE MANGINIS

A collection of Chinese ceramics at the Benaki Museum

THE EIGHT HUNDRED Chinese ceramics, donated to the Benaki Museum by the Greek-born British businessman George Eumorfopoulos (fig. 1), are the most exotic among the Museum's wide-ranging collections.¹ They are little known and have remained in storage for more than a decade despite being the largest collection of Far Eastern works of art in Greece.² This article introduces an ongoing research project into their history and heralds their study and re-display.

Silks, metalwork, sculpture and lacquerware from China have been collected for millennia in Asia, the Islamic world and Europe. However, it was ceramics above all that fascinated those who could afford it. Overland and sea trade routes had been taking hardwearing vessels from Chinese kiln sites to the Mediterranean and Africa since the first millennium AD. The opening up of global networks by European seafarers during the sixteenth century even brought them to Mexico, Brazil and the western coast of North America. Distant markets appreciated their light weight, translucent body and attractive glazes.

Customers in these remote destinations inventively adapted Chinese pots, often fitting them with mounts and using them for novel purposes (fig. 2). Gradually, foreign buyers were able to commission specially-made items, the so-called 'export' wares. These hybrids blended Chinese, Japanese, South East Asian, Indian, Islamic, European and American shapes and decorative motifs/decoration (figs 3 and 4). Foreign demand and the business acumen of Chinese potters resulted in a specialized industrial production. By the Song period (960-1279) up to 100,000 pots could be accommodated at a single firing in one kiln. The

superior quality and extensive production of Chinese pottery items prompted one of the longest-lasting collecting traditions both in and outside China.

By the time George Eumorfopoulos (18 April 1863 - 19 December 1939) started collecting Oriental art in the 1890s, there were already enormous collections of Chinese ceramics in England accumulated through centuries of trade. Underglaze blue and polychrome enamelled 'export' porcelains with vegetal decoration or scenes from classical Chinese stories appeared evocative to Western eyes (fig. 5). In the late Victorian period, a fashion for Kangxi (1661-1722) blue and white porcelains increased the demand and the prices paid for them (fig. 6). It was championed by the painter James Abbott MacNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and conformed to 'aesthetic' ideals. In France, Second Empire and *Belle Époque* decoration opted for ornate bronzes, intricate lacquers and Chinese vases with strong colours and gilding. Eumorfopoulos, a Liverpool-born and London-bred trader whose parents came from Chios, followed these fashions in his early purchases. He also favoured eighteenth-century European porcelain and early Islamic glass and metalwork, similarly popular with Orientalist aesthetes. But he soon diversified into a fresh collecting field, encouraged by lower prices and circumstances thousands of miles away.

During the first years of the twentieth century a network of train lines was being built in China around the capital Peking (Beijing). Excavations for the railway brought to light thousands of tombs furnished with suites of terracotta human figures; models of animals and buildings as well as vessels were unearthed beside them (figs 7, 8). These trap-



Fig. 1. George Eumorfopoulos (1863-1939).

pings would accompany the high-ranking deceased to the afterlife. Similar items had been found in China before, but owning tomb wares was (and remains) taboo for the Chinese. However, foreign employees of railway companies had no such qualms and the items quickly found their way into the European art market. Eumorfopoulos must have been one of the first to realize their aesthetic merits back in 1906. When the Burlington Fine Arts Club organized the first exhibition of early Chinese ceramics in 1910, he was the main lender and contributed entries to the catalogue text.³

Eumorfopoulos' preference for these pieces of sculptural quality and imperfect finish was unusual within the tradition of Chinese art collecting. However, it accorded well with the 'modern' art aesthetic flourishing in Paris and inspired by 'primitive' art. The London collector was interested in radical artistic groups and attended the oc-

casional exhibitions of their work across the Channel. His acquisitions included post-Impressionist, Fauvist, Cubist, Expressionist and abstract paintings and sculptures. Closer to home, the Arts and Crafts movement had promoted the virtues of manufacture by hand and individuality and paved the way for an English craft movement, predominantly in studio pottery.⁴ Eumorfopoulos was a patron of the Japanese potter Shoji Hamada (1894-1978) and his British disciples Bernard Leach (1887-1979) and Charles Vyse (1882-1971), all of whom studied and emulated antique items in his collection. Song period ceramics in particular (fig. 9) combined sensuous surfaces, sophisticated manufacture and the imprint of the potter's hand, qualities appreciated by artist potters. Such wares were the polar diametrically opposite of industrial British kiln production. They evoked the simplicity and honesty of medieval craftspeople and accorded well with modern sensibilities (fig. 10).

This mixture of contemporary and antique art objects, selected for their aesthetic appeal and exhibited within a modern setting, is exemplified in a set of photographs of interiors from Eumorfopoulos' house. By 1934, his spacious residence and the mews annexe behind it housed one of the largest Chinese art collections ever amassed. His eclectic style married a late Victorian structure with mock-Georgian ornamentation, Renaissance and eighteenth-century French and English antiques, Art Deco display cases and Oriental artefacts (fig. 11). His interest in ceramic tomb goods from the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and Tang (618-907) periods had expanded to include ceramic, metal, silk, stone and lacquer items from all epochs. The collection satisfied an appetite stimulated by his 'eye' for beauty. Chinese paintings hanging alongside medieval tapestries in front of contemporary sculptures by Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915) bear testimony to a well-heeled bohemian worldview. His omnivorous encyclopaedism was impervious to collecting traditions and the social norms dictating them (fig. 12).

While Eumorfopoulos was combing the docks of London in search of vases, another collector was following an alternative path to a smaller but more select collection. Sir Percival David (1892-1964) belonged to an eminent family of Jewish bankers in colonial India originating from Baghdad. Highly educated and with considerable funds and time at his disposal, he became fluent in classical Chinese, visited China several times and wrote many essays.⁵



Fig. 2. Porcelain cup with moulded animal and vegetal decoration. Made in the region of Dehua, Fujian province, southeast China, during the 17th century.

Fitted with a gilt metal handle, lip and foot in Europe during the 18th century, height 8.5 cm.
Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2577.

The function of the cup as a libation vessel for a domestic altar or a wine cup was changed into a tea or chocolate cup with the fitting of a handle. Many copies of similar plain white vessels were produced in Europe during the 18th century, named *blanc de Chine* ('China white').

Fig. 3. Porcelain censer with underglaze blue and overglaze enamel vegetal decoration and Arabic inscriptions within medallions. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China, in the 16th century (Ming dynasty), height 9.5 cm.

Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2589.

This censer bears Arabic inscriptions within a purely Chinese decorative scheme on a Chinese-shaped vessel. It was probably commissioned by Middle Eastern clients or Muslims living in China. Arabic calligraphy is commonly found on palace orders for the court of the Zhengde emperor (1491-1521, reigned 1505-1521), a Muslim sympathizer and possible convert to Islam.



Fig. 4. Porcelain cup with overglaze enamel decoration of cartouches and C-scrolls around the rim and an armorial device. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China, during the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1711-1799, reigned 1735-1796), height 7 cm.

Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2887.

The sinuous profile of this cup is inspired by 18th-century European silverware, the decoration features *rococo* scrolls and the front is branded with the coat of arms of some noble European family. The stylistic features entirely deny its Chinese provenance. Large quantities of porcelain continued to be commissioned from China after the secret of its manufacture was discovered in the West. The high quality and low cost made these pieces competitive in comparison with the output of European kilns.

Fig. 5. Porcelain scroll stand with overglaze enamel decoration of men reclining under trees. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China, during the reign of the Kangxi emperor (1654-1722, reigned 1661-1722), length 26.5 cm.

Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2719.



Fig. 6. Porcelain *hookah* base with underglaze cobalt blue painted decoration. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China during the reign of the Kangxi emperor (1654-1722, reigned 1661-1722), height 38 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2682.

This bottle was originally fitted with a metal device to enable its use as a water pipe (*hookah*). The shape copies *hookahs* produced in Mughal India during the 17th century and it was probably made for export to this part of the world. However, the decoration is purely Chinese in technique and subject matter.



Fig. 7. Glazed terracotta figurine of a camel. Made in the Henan or Shaanxi provinces, central China, during the Sui (581-618) or early Tang (618-906) dynasties, height 35.5 cm, length 33.5 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2186.

This figurine is probably one of the earliest Chinese archaeological items to reach Europe, possibly between 1906 and 1910. The trade in excavated artefacts started in 1906 and Eumorfopoulos was the first to collect them on a large scale. This is one of the earliest Chinese burial models ever to be collected anywhere, since these tomb offerings were not considered auspicious in their homeland. Like most animal statuettes, its legs have been broken, perhaps by the gravediggers themselves, to facilitate packing and export.

His collection consisted of ceramics covering a small time span (tenth to eighteenth century) and tried to emulate the taste of the eighteenth-century Qianlong emperor (1711-1799, reigned 1735-1796). David favoured specific wares and shapes and avoided, even excluded, anything outside the imperial canon. He insisted on sparsely decorated Song stonewares (figs 9, 13), Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming blue and white (fig. 14), Qing enamelled porcelains of superior quality (1644-1911) and monochromes (fig. 15). The canon excluded earthenware and other materials. The few magnificent paintings and early printed books simply



Fig. 8. Glazed earthenware tripod vessel. Made in the Henan province, central China, during the Tang dynasty (618-906), height 16.5 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2242.

Despite the simplicity of its shape and monochrome decoration, this vessel is generously covered in a cobalt-rich glaze. Cobalt, a mineral pigment that fired a deep blue colour, was imported during the Tang dynasty from Central Asia and was expensive. Consequently, it was only used for the best quality wares. The individual accompanied by such luxurious burial gifts must have enjoyed an elevated status.

complemented the ceramics at the heart of his collection. This collection was donated in 1950 to the University of London and was known as the 'Percival David Foundation' until its recent closure.⁶

Sir Percival David and George Eumorfopoulos were the two individuals who promoted more than any other the practice of collecting Chinese art in twentieth century Europe. They were both of foreign extraction and, albeit affluent, were not part of the upper classes in the rigid class structure of early twentieth century Britain. For the meticulous and scholarly Jew collecting fulfilled the urge to explore and organize the mysterious universe that was China. For the passionate and entrepreneurial Greek collecting satisfied his personal aspirations and longing for beauty. He probably followed a pattern established by the Ionides family of Constantinopolitan Greeks. Alexander Constantine Ionides (1810-1890) and his extended fam-



Fig. 9. Glazed stoneware tripod censer. Made in the Longquan kilns, Zhejiang province, southeast China, during the Song dynasty (960-1279), height 7.5 cm.

Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2388.

The subdued colour and soft lustre of this vessel epitomize the aesthetic appeal of Song dynasty monochrome ceramics. Thickly applied on a dark body, the glaze appears deep and glossy. Such wares enjoyed a great reputation in both China and Japan from early times. The metallic areas on the foot and rim are gold lacquer repairs made while the item was in a Japanese collection. Such treatment was only reserved for the most valuable of ceramics.

ily were enthusiastic art lovers. They had gained fame (and even notoriety) in Victorian England through their lavish spending, socializing and dallying with avant-garde artists. This association resulted in the creation by Alexander Alexander Ionides (known as 'Aleco', 1840-1898) of a 'palace of art' at Holland Park, near the house of the most established painter of the time Frederic Lord Leighton (1830-1896) and other Royal Academicians.

Similarly, Eumorfopoulos moved in 1922 to 7 Chelsea Embankment, at the heart of an elegant artistic neighbourhood where Whistler, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Dante Gabriel Charles Rossetti (1828-1882) had lived. The Ionides family had purchased what they considered the highest contemporary art form, painting, and donated the fruits of their collecting to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1901. Eumorfopoulos and David donated to the Benaki Museum and University of London respectively



Fig. 10. Glazed stoneware vessel with phosphatic splashes. Made in the Henan province, central China, during the Tang dynasty (618-906), height 12 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2265.

Irregular splashes and random colours produced by partially-controlled chemical reactions fascinated studio potters in the early 20th century. Similar effects had been explored by Chinese potters since the first millennium AD. This deceptively simple Tang dynasty pot demonstrates a technologically sophisticated glaze.

what to their generation was the essence of Chinese art, ceramics.⁷

The predominance of ceramics among other arts and the long European tradition of collecting porcelain encouraged Eumorfopoulos to create a teaching collection initially of 104 pots. They encompassed the breadth of Chinese ceramic traditions from the Bronze Age to the eighteenth century and were first loaned to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. They later formed the nucleus of his donation to the Greek nation, 341 items that reached Piraeus on 4th May 1929. He had approached Antonis Benakis (1873-1954) to act as intermediary and arrange an exhibition venue. Benakis suggested their inclusion in the museum he founded in memory of his father Emmanuel (1843-1929) in 1930. After Eumorfopoulos had sold the bulk of his collection to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert in 1934 because of the economic recession, he presented another 452 pieces to the Benaki (May 1936). He also commissioned, shipped and paid for the mahogany display cases. Finally, he arranged for Leigh



Fig. 11. A room in the George Eumorfopoulos residence at 7 Chelsea Embankment, Chelsea, London. Photograph taken in autumn-winter 1934.

The eclectic mix of European and Oriental antiques in this photograph exemplifies Eumorfopoulos' catholic tastes.

Fig. 12. A room in the George Eumorfopoulos residence at 7 Chelsea Embankment, Chelsea, London. Photograph taken in autumn-winter 1934.

A collection of contemporary sculpture complements the severe Victorian panelled room. Some Chinese porcelain is arranged above the panelling, in late 19th-century fashion.

Ashton (1897-1983), a keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum, to compile a catalogue in English. His entries were based on the six-volume publication of Eumorfopoulos' ceramic collection.⁸

An analysis of the donation as catalogued by Ashton reveals the discrepancies between the aesthetic preferences of the private collector and the educational priorities of a



Fig. 13. Glazed stoneware dish with incised and carved decoration. Made in the Ding kilns, Hebei province, Northern China, during the Song dynasty (960-1279), diameter 22 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2372. The decoration on this dish was carved and incised on the stoneware body. The vessel was then dipped in a fine glaze that fired an ivory-white colour. The delicacy of the resulting product anticipated the translucency of porcelain. The output of the Ding kilns was elevated to legendary status within the Chinese collecting tradition that Sir Percival David emulated.

museum institution. Eumorfopoulos intended his eight-hundred-strong ceramic group to educate the Greek public. Therefore he made some surprising choices, given his modernist ideals and partiality for early Chinese pottery. Densely decorated, exotic and representational Qing pieces, considered derivative by his generation, represent nearly 40% of the collection. Tang ceramics represent 12.8%,

Song 19.57% and Ming 18.8%. A study of the remainder of his private collection, as auctioned in 1940 after his death, reveals that when he followed his 'eye' and personal taste, the choices were different: Tang 9.75%, Song 23.60%, Ming 31.43% and Qing 29.34%.⁹ 'Degenerate' products of the last dynasty were closer to the European stereotypes of China which had not been updated along with aesthetics.



Fig. 14. Porcelain dish decorated under the glaze with cobalt blue vegetal motifs. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China in the early 15th century (Ming dynasty), probably in the reign of the Xuande emperor (1398-1435, reigned 1425-1435), diameter 38 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2516.

Meticulously decorated blue and white porcelains were popular with Chinese and Middle Eastern collectors and the largest collections survive in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul and the Ardebil Shrine in Iran.



Fig. 15. Porcelain water pot covered in a pale blue glaze. Made in Jingdezhen town, Jiangxi province, south China, during the early 18th century, probably in the reign of the Yongzheng emperor (1678-1735, reigned 1722-1735), height 13 cm. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 2661.

The technology required to produce the pale blue colour of this globular pot was far removed from the Song dynasty stonewares it tried to emulate (fig. 9). However, great care was taken to achieve a similar hue and depth of colour in a demonstration of scholarly antiquarianism.

If the public was to be introduced to an alien culture, strong colours and lively images had to predominate.¹⁰

An earlier attempt at donation by Eumorfopoulos to Greece adds a further dimension to his gesture. It is documented in a letter from the painter Nikolaos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika (1906-1994) to his friend Angelos Katakouzenos (1904-1982): “*It was Eumorfopoulos who suggested donating his entire collection to Greece if they only built an appropriate museum. But Plastiras, in the name of Greece, declined*”.¹¹ Nikolaos Plastiras (1883-1953) could only have given his negative answer while in office (i.e. from late 1922 to December 1923). Only months earlier, Eumorfopoulos had founded the Oriental Ceramic Society, an institution dedicated to the promotion of Chinese studies in England.¹² However, he was eager to donate all his treasures to a country he first visited on the occasion of the Benaki Museum’s

inauguration nine years later. Tellingly, he offered Greece a second helping of vases once he had sold the remainder of his collection to the British state for £100,000.

This generosity testifies to the idealistic veneration of an expatriate Greek for a homeland he only knew from a distance. He had been educated at the London Greek College and remained an active member of the Greek community in the British capital. He worked in the trading firm of Ralli Brothers, originating in Constantinople, and served as a churchwarden in the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Saint Sophia in 1891 and 1919. The somewhat antiquated Greek he used in his correspondence with Benakis is flawless and his library included several books on Greek art, although his collection excluded it.¹³ This evidence explains the nostalgia evident in the 1922 gesture, meaningfully coinciding with the implosion of Hellenism after the Asia

Minor catastrophe. The second, more successful, attempt to donate took shape in 1928, the year of Eleutherios Venizelos' (1862-1936) return to power. Eumorfopoulos admitted how very pleased he was that his collection would arrive in Athens under a Venizelan government.¹⁴ Venizelos in his turn was 'enthusiastic' and promised to do "all he could to display it as it should [be displayed]".¹⁵

His awareness of Greek culture and current affairs confirms Eumorfopoulos' philhellenic romanticism. His contribution materialized as works of art, just as the Ionides' gifts eighty years earlier had taken the form of schools and hospitals. By the 1920s the young state was considered mature enough to appreciate the value of art (even foreign art) to educating the people. The donation fitted well with the vision of a progressive Greece crystallised in Venizelos' policies, the Benaki Museum and the ideology of the 'Generation of the Thirties' group of artists and intellectuals. By accepting his generous offer, the enlightened political and cultural leadership of his Greek homeland endorsed the gentile London businessman's claim to posterity.¹⁶

Museum objects can be viewed within multiple contexts: creation, consumption at the time of manufacture, resale and collecting and eventual public display. This article has delved into the historiography of the Eumorfopoulos donation to the Benaki Museum. It has also examined a few objects in the light of twentieth-century European collecting and Greek politics. These are only two of the contexts within which the ceramics can be read. However, they are the contexts that resulted in this collection being offered to the Athenian museum. If the idiosyncrasies of the collection are to be understood, the motives and circumstances of its assembling have to be appreciated. The personality, tastes and ideas of Eumorfopoulos shaped this chapter in the story of the eight hundred pots. When redisplayed, they will carry the mark of his choice as they now bear the fingerprints of the potter who fashioned them.

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NOTES

1. The most detailed account of Eumorfopoulos' life can be found in: G. Manginis, Γεώργιος Ευμορφόπουλος 1863-1939, Συλλέκτης, *Pelinnaio* 37 (2006) 27-30; a simplified family tree is assembled in: V. Agiannidis, Απλουστευμένη γενεαλογία δύο κλάδων της οικογένειας Ευμορφόπουλου, *Pelinnaio* 37 (2006) 31, based on Philip P. Argenti, *Libro d'Oro de la Noblesse de Chio 2: Arbres Généalogiques* (London 1955).

2. The collection was published in a hard-to-find catalogue with few illustrations: Leigh Ashton – R. L. Hobson, *Benaki Museum Athens. Catalogue of the Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* (Athens 1939); another brief presentation in: E. Cadwalader Bunker, Chinese Ceramics in the Benaki Museum in Athens, *Orientalism* 20:10 (1989) 47-52.

3. C. H. Read (ed.), *Burlington Fine Arts Club: Exhibition of Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain 1910* (London 1911).

4. J. Green, 'A New Orientation of Ideas': Collecting and the Taste for Early Chinese Ceramics in England: 1921-1936, in: St. Pierson (ed.), *Collecting Chinese Art: Interpretation and Display, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia 20* (London 2000) 43-56.

5. Eumorfopoulos wrote scholarly essays as well: G. Eumorfopoulos, Ying Ch'ing, Ju and Ch'ai Yao, *Transactions*

of the Oriental Ceramic Society (1922-1923) 24-28; *idem*, Han and Chou Pottery, *Artibus Asiae* 1 (1925) 202-09; *idem*, Glazed Pottery of the Han Dynasty, *Artibus Asiae* 2 (1927) 140; *idem*, A Bowl in Stockholm (Note on Coloured Plate), *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* (1931-1932) 10-12; *idem*, Descriptions of Specimens: IV – Lacquer Toilet Box, *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 15 (1937-1938) 12. However, he had no knowledge of the Chinese language and limited himself to small-scale contributions.

6. St. Pierson, An Academic Collector: Sir Percival David and the School of Oriental and African Studies, *Orientalism* 38:8 (2007) 91-93.

7. G. Manginis, 'For the benefit of the nation': The Ionides and Eumorfopoulos Collections, *Yearbook of the Greek Cathedral of St Sophia* (2003) 28-31; the Ionides legacy is presented in Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven-London 1999) 4-10, 14-17, 106-21.

8. R. L. Hobson, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain*, 1: *From the Chou to the End of the T'ang Dynasty* (London 1925); *idem*, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain*, 2: *From T'ang to Ming: Ju, Kuan, Ko, Lung-*

Ch'üan & Chien Wares (London 1926); *idem*, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain, 3: From T'ang to Ming: Chün, Ting and Tz'ü Chou Wares* (London 1926); *idem*, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain, 4: The Ming Dynasty* (London 1927); *idem*, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain, 5: The Ch'ing Dynasty Porcelain: K'ang Hsi, Yung Ch'eng, Ch'ien Lung, and Later Periods* (London 1927); *idem*, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection. Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain, 6: Chinese Pottery, Korean and Persian Wares, and Recent Additions* (London 1928).

9. *The Eumorfopoulos Collections; Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection of Chinese Ceramics, Bronzes, Gold Ornaments, Lacquer, Jade, Glass and Works of Art formed by the Late George Eumorfopoulos, Esq.*, catalogue of a sale at Sotheby and Co., London 28-31 May 1940.

10. G. Manginis, The George Eumorfopoulos donation to the Benaki Museum in Athens, *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 66 (2001-2002) 80-82; *idem*, George Eumorfopoulos: Collector, in: *Imperial Treasures from China: The Greek contribution, catalogue of an exhibition at the National Gallery of Athens* (Athens 2004) 18-23, 100, 102-03, 108-13, 115-18, 123-28, 130-31, 135-38, 143-47,

150-51, 154-59, 161-63, 165-68, 171-75, 191-93, 195.

11. Letter from London, dated 11 September 1980, in the archives of the Angelos and Leto Katakouzenos Foundation (unpublished).

12. George Eumorfopoulos was a founding member and lifelong President of the Oriental Ceramic Society. The Society is still based in London but has a worldwide membership. It presents monthly lectures on Oriental art, organizes catalogued exhibitions with items drawn from members' collections and publishes the *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*. For more information on the work of the O.C.S. and membership: www.ocs-london.com.

13. The unpublished correspondence, comprising more than a hundred letters dating between 1927 and 1939, is preserved in the Benaki Museum archives. On the Eumorfopoulos library: Yoshiko Yasumura, George Eumorfopoulos and the University of London, *Orientalism* 38:8 (2007) 86-90.

14. Eumorfopoulos' letter to Benakis, 14 October 1928 (unpublished).

15. Benakis' letter to Eumorfopoulos, 4 June 1929 (unpublished).

16. Manginis, The George Eumorfopoulos donation (n. 10) 82-86.

ΓΙΩΡΓΗΣ ΜΑΓΓΙΝΗΣ

Μια συλλογή κινεζικής κεραμικής στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη

Η συλλογή κινεζικής κεραμικής του Μουσείου Μπενάκη δωρήθηκε ανάμεσα στα έτη 1927 και 1936 από τον χιακής καταγωγής Βρετανό επιχειρηματία Γεώργιο Ευμορφόπουλο (1863-1939) (εικ. 1). Αποτελεί ένα από τα πρωιμότερα σύνολα απωανατολικής κεραμικής που αποθησαυρίστηκαν με σκοπό την έκθεσή τους σε μουσείο και αντιπροσωπεύει ό,τι για τους μελετητές της μεσοπολεμικής Δύσης χαρακτήριζε την τέχνη της Κίνας. Περιλαμβάνει αποκλειστικά έργα κεραμικής, της δημοφιλέστερης έκφρασης της κινεζικής καλλιτεχνικής παραγωγής. Η γενιά του Ευμορφόπουλου εστίασε στις πρώιμες περιόδους της κινεζικής τέχνης, αναγνωρίζοντας στα τεχνουργήματά τους τις αισθητικές αρχές που ενέπνευσαν τις αναζητήσεις πρωτοπόρων καλλιτεχνών του πρώιμου 20ού αιώνα: αδρότητα γραμμών, απλότητα διακόσμησης, αισθαντικές εφυαλώσεις, ηθελημένα “ημιτελές” αποτέλεσμα (εικ. 7-

10, 13). Μολονότι τα χαρακτηριστικά αυτά απαντούν στη συλλογή του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, η πλειονότητα των αντικειμένων φαίνεται πως συνάδει με στερεότυπα του 19ου αιώνα, εμμένοντας σε ιστορημένες πορσελάνες με “εξωτική” θεματολογία (εικ. 3-6). Η επιλογή αυτή πιθανότατα υπαγορεύθηκε από τον παιδευτικό ρόλο της συλλογής. Παρά ταύτα, ο Ευμορφόπουλος ήταν πρωτοπόρος στις συλλεκτικές του προτιμήσεις και είχε ευρύτερες αντιλήψεις από συγχρόνους του ακαδημαϊκούς συλλέκτες, όπως ο Sir Percival David. Η εγκυκλοπαιδική και αισθητική προσέγγισή του συνδύαζε έργα σύγχρονης τέχνης, ευρωπαϊκές αντίκες και απωανατολικά και ιολαμικά τεχνουργήματα (εικ. 11, 12). Ο φιλελληνισμός του προσέγγιζε εκείνον των Ελλήνων συλλεκτών της όψιμης βικτοριανής Βρετανίας, όπως η οικογένεια Ιωνίδη· εκείνοι όμως επέλεξαν να προσφέρουν εκπαιδευτικά ιδρύματα



και νοσοκομεία, παρά έργα τέχνης στο νέο κράτος. Ο Ευμορφόπουλος, ενστερνιζόμενος τις αντιλήψεις μιας νέας εποχής, προσέφερε όλη την εντυπωσιακή συλλογή του στο ελληνικό κράτος κατά τα έτη 1922-1923, μια δωρεά που αγνοήθηκε από την κυβέρνηση Νικόλαου Πλαστήρα. Ύστερα από πέντε χρόνια, μια ευτυχέστερη συγκυρία έφερε κοντά τον Βρετανό συλλέκτη με τον Αντώνη Μπενάκη ως μεσάζοντα και τον Ελευθέριο Βενιζέλο ως πολιτικό αποδέκτη μιας νέας, μικρότερης δωρεάς. Το εν-

θουσιώδες καλωσόρισμά της οφείλεται στην επιρροή της “γενιάς του ’30” που ευαγγελιζόταν την οικουμενικότητα, την πνευματικότητα και την προοδευτικότητα της νέας Ελλάδας μετά το τραύμα της μικρασιατικής καταστροφής. Συμπερασματικά, η συλλογή Ευμορφόπουλου αποτέλεσε με ενάργεια όχι μόνο την ιστορία της κινεζικής κεραμικής, αλλά και τις ιστορικές πραγματικότητες της Βρετανίας και της Ελλάδας την εποχή κατά την οποία συγκεντρώθηκε και δωρήθηκε.

