

## Ovidian Scenes on 18th-century Chinese Porcelain

In the early eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain manufacturers began to produce ware specifically designed for the European market. These trade porcelains depict not only traditional Chinese scenes, but also religious, political and mythological themes from Europe. Book engravings obtained from European merchants and missionaries were often used as models by these Chinese artists. Mythological scenes began to appear on Chinese export porcelains in 1735-1740 and were very popular for about twenty years. Among these are a number of porcelains depicting scenes based on European engravings made for 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century texts of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

This presentation considers several examples of such porcelains using Ovidian engravings by Bernard Picart (1673-1733), Sébastien Leclerc (1637–1714) and others. Scenes on Chinese porcelains include the death of Semele from *Metamorphoses* 3, and, from *Metamorphoses* 6, Jupiter and Mnemosyne, Neptune disguised as a ram, and Apollo and Issa. In particular, three punchbowls in *famille rose*, one from the ex-Mottahedeh Collection, a second in Laurient, France, and a third in the Winterthur collection all share four scenes from the *Metamorphoses*: the Fall of Phaethon (*Metamorphoses* 2), the triumph of Bacchus and Perseus' rescue of Andromeda (*Metamorphoses* 4) and the rape of Proserpina (*Metamorphoses* 5). Perseus and Andromeda also appear on a plate in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

In this presentation the Ovidian scenes on these Chinese bowls are discussed in the context of the history of Chinese Export Porcelains. Comparing such porcelains to the original engravings suggests how the Chinese artist(s) adapted their sources to the porcelain medium, how details are changed or omitted and how new details are added. While Ovid's text was not used directly by these artist(s), some comparison of the scene on the porcelain to the Ovidian text

is also warranted. Above all, these Chinese porcelains demonstrate the intriguing role Ovid's *Metamorphoses* played at a significant point in the cultural interchange between Europe and China in the eighteenth century.

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