

A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



Ewer Made for the Indian Market

Guangzhou, China, 18th century

Copper enamel

31cm high, 23cm wide

The vessel is formed from beaten copper to give a shape that is clearly non-Chinese and was designed for a client in the Middle East or India, with a flattened pear-shaped body and long slender spout and handle. Its surface is painted with a rainbow of painted enamels. The crafting of ewers was an industry that flourished in Iran and spread from there to Iraq and Egypt. The shape is also seen in Mughal Indian miniatures of the mid-seventeenth century.¹ Different forms of ewers and the roles they played were manifold. They were employed to pour water for bathing, for hand-washing, or for wudu (obligatory ablutions before prayer). Ornamental ewers were also used to decorate the palaces and houses of amirs and sultans.² A highly ornamental vessel of this style with non-figural decoration would be suited to either domestic or ritual use.

This ewer was produced in Guangzhou, where, from the second half of the eighteenth century, artisans in small workshops manufactured enamel goods of the highest quality, some destined for court and some for export.³ The artisans were used to producing foreign shapes and decorations. In this case, the form of the ewer clearly derives from Indian metalwork. Its decoration, on the other hand, is entirely Chinese. Shaped, repoussé panels on each side contain peony flowers and ripe peaches, symbolising beauty, nobility and long life. Peony scrolls wind round the foot and beneath the mouth, while the main ground is covered with a dense, brocade-like pattern and repeating scrolls in red and black. The decoration recalls that seen on painted enamels made for the Qing dynasty court. However, this vessel was clearly made for export. The skilled enamel decorators in Guangzhou had a common repertory for goods, reproducing patterns and styles they were familiar with, even on shapes that were not.

Footnotes:

1. Susan Stronge. 1985. *Bidri Ware. Inlaid Metalwork from India*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum. p.40.
2. Al-Sayyed Muhammad Khalifa Hammad. 2020. "Ewer" in *Discover Islamic Art, Museum With No Frontiers*.

http://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=object;ISL;eg;Mus01;20;en

3. Shih Ching-fei and Wang Chongqi 施靜菲, 王崇齊. 2013. "Qianlongchao yuehaiguan chengzuo zhi <Guang falang> 乾隆朝粵海關成做之<光瑱瑯>" ('Canton enamels' Manufactured at the Guangdong Maritime Customs in the Qianlong Period)", in *Guoli Taiwan daxue meishu shi yanjiu jikan 國立台灣大學美術史研究集刊*.35 (National Taiwan University Art History Research Papers vol.35). Taipei: National Taiwan University. pp.87-163+165-184+257. Shih Ching-fei 施靜菲. 2014. "Qianlong yuehaiguan chengzuo. Guangfalang fukeban zuopin 乾隆粵海關成做。光瑱瑯復刻版作品 (Imperial "Guang falang" of the Qianlong Period Manufactured by the Guangdong Maritime Customs. Painted enamels duplicate works from Guangzhou)", in *Gugong wenwu jikan 故宮文物季刊 (Palace Museum Quarterly)* no.373. Taipei: National Palace Museum. pp.50-63.