



Filip Suchomel, Marcela Suchomelová: *Mistrovská díla japonského porcelánu* (Masterpieces of Japanese Porcelain, a catalogue published at the occasion of the exhibition held in the National Gallery, Sternberg Palace, Prague, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1997 - 11<sup>th</sup> January 1998, and at the Moravian Gallery, Museum of Decorative Arts, Brno, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1998 - 29<sup>th</sup> March 1998). The publication of the catalogue was supported by The Japan Foundation. Praha, Národní galerie, 1997, 208 pp. Reviewed by Alice Kraemerová.

The publication is an exhibition catalogue, but in its scope and treatment extends beyond the limits of a mere catalogue. The authors strive to present a short history of how the production of Japanese porcelain has developed over time, serving as an introduction for amateur enthusiasts, and try to introduce works of Japanese porcelain accommodated in collections in the Czech Republic and the results of their research into the origins of these works.

The catalogue is divided into three parts. The initial section gives a history of Japanese porcelain over eight chapters; the last chapter is devoted to the porcelain artefacts to be found in Bohemian and Moravian castles. The second part offers archive sources, tracing the origin of Far Eastern works and determining their ownership over time. The third section presents 322 real masterpieces, displayed at the exhibition and kept in various exhibition collections and castle depositories throughout the Czech Republic. The brief descriptions usual for exhibits are rounded off with very detailed accounts of the design and the techniques used. In the case of oriental motifs in particular, these descriptions can be most useful in having a better understanding of what are sometimes not clearly identifiable patterns. The final integral part of the publication consists of very detailed notes, a source list, a bibliography, and a glossary of Japanese terms mentioned in the text and necessary for descriptions of phenomena unfamiliar in the Czech milieu.

The catalogue is clearly organized and compiled in order to present an instructive summary of the development of porcelain production and por-

celain exports to Europe. An elaborate search in the archives and the processing of the information discovered here forms another interesting feature of academic work that is seldom presented publicly.

The catalogue offers a substantial amount of information, including notes and bibliography. Both the perfect graphic design and the high quality of the colour photographs emphasize the great care taken in preparation of the whole catalogue. Nevertheless, the careful graphic layout is marred by sloppy binding – once the catalogue has been leafed through several times, pages become loose and tattered.

The authors clearly spent many years searching castle archives and depositories, as well as local museums and galleries, in order to gather all the information they needed. During this demanding work they are bound to have come across a huge number of artefacts that, although not masterpieces, are still interesting, if only for the purposes of statistics. Some of these data could have been mentioned, as marginal notes if nothing else. The chapter on Japanese porcelain in Central European collections fails to include information on the number of artefacts involved. This gives rise to the question of whether some comparison on a European scale might be interesting. The final paragraph of the chapter on European collections states that '... collections of Japanese porcelain in Bohemia and Moravia are not comparable in number with collections in most European countries, but they do include objects of outstanding artistic value.'

The title of catalogue itself implies that masterpieces are readily available in Czech collections. We can only regret that the catalogue has not been published in English, as it is a publication that would undoubtedly be appreciated by European and Japanese experts, as well as enthusiasts and students of Japanese art.